

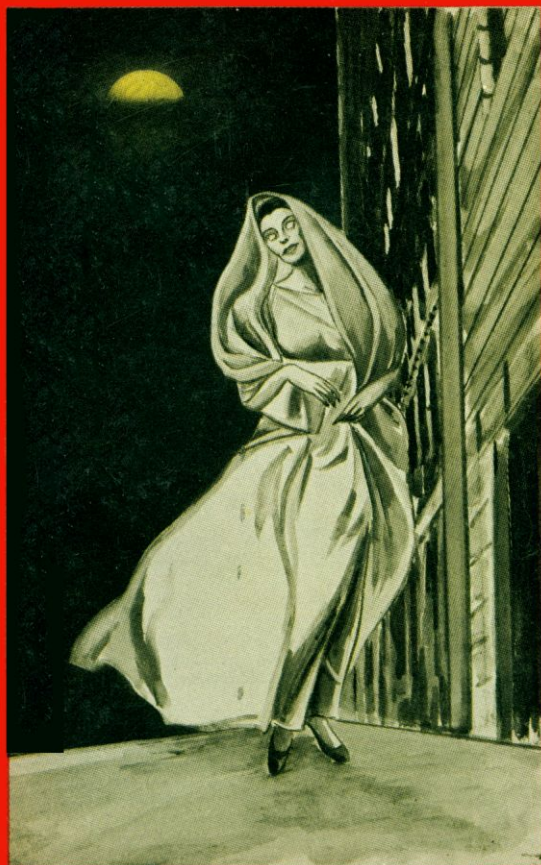
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# MAGAZINE OF HORROR

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**EDMOND HAMILTON**

## **LAIR OF THE STAR-SPAWN**

by  
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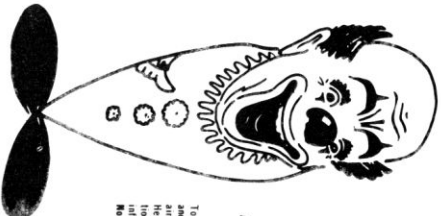
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# magazine of **HORROR**

## **The Bizarre and The Unusual**

Volume 3

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**Robert A. W. Lowndes, Editor**

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# Introduction

As we were preparing the preliminary material for this issue of MOH, we were saddened to hear of the death of Dr. David H. Keller on July 13, 1966. He had had an emergency operation, gone through a very difficult period, then seemed to be making a fine recovery when the end came quietly and peacefully at 1.05 in the morning.

That is was truly the end, I do not believe; and Dr. Keller himself was not dogmatic on the subject. In an interview published in the fan magazine *Science Fiction Digest*, July 1933 (Dr. Keller was ever generous in donating material to fan magazines) he wrote: I look forward to death as the Great Adventure. If after death comes nothingness, what a wonderful rest it will be, for I have been tired for many years. And if there is another life, I will go further, see more, spend less, than I have on any trip so far. The first thing I will do is to hunt up a good library. I am afraid that the Heavenly one is rather well censored, and I may have to go to the asbestos library of Gehenna to get the books I want to read. Then I am going to start writing. My idea of Heaven is to have every story accepted by an appreciative editor."

He had been writing since the age of fourteen and it would be forty years before a single story from his pen was accepted for professional publication. Meanwhile he became a General Practitioner and was a horse-and-buggy doctor in a small country town for ten years, becoming interested in Psychiatry in 1915. In 1917 he became a First Lieutenant in the Army Medical Reserve and served through both World Wars, retiring from military service with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. He practiced psychiatry until 1945, after serving as Assistant Superintendent in state hospitals for the insane in Pennsylvania, Illinois, Louisiana and Tennessee.

A fascinating biographical sketch of his career, and an analysis of his writing, by Sam Moskowitz (from whom we have drawn for these preliminary notes) appears as the introduction to the collection, *Life Everlasting*, from which we purchased one-time reprint rights to *Heredity*, published in our last issue. Our final correspondence with him included our apology for the inadvertent omission of the credit line with that story, which would have read: "From *Life Everlasting*, copyright 1947 by David H. Keller; by permission of Dr. Keller". Graciously accepting our apology, he noted that he had tried to sell the story to a pulp mystery-terror magazine in 1947,



where it was rejected as too gruesome . . . "we dare not give it to our readers", the editor going on to say that there was "a limit to the shocking".

It was reported in the 30's that Harry Bates, editor of *STRANGE TALES* bet Dr. Keller that he could not write a real horror story. Dr. Keller replied by sending Bates, *The Dead Woman*, which was at once accepted for *STRANGE TALES* — but, alas, the magazine went under before it could be published; later, Farnsworth Wright rejected it as too shocking for *WEIRD TALES*. It was published in a fan magazine, during the 30's, and did not see professional publication until the 40's, when *STRANGE TALES* ran it.

Dr. Keller was in his 40's (47, Moskowitz says) when his first story was published professionally — *The Revolt of the Pedestrians*, in the February 1928 issue of *AMAZING STORIES*. He made an instant hit with the readers, for not only was the theme of the story a most imaginative one, but the style of writing was quite different from what readers had seen before in the magazine. Instead of copy-book-type speeches put into the mouths of the characters, and the characters themselves stereotypes of professors, scientists, etc., such as never were, here were people who talked the way human beings do talk.

In recent years, various literary-minded science fiction critics have claimed that people do not talk this way at all; I can only say that these critics never lived in a small town, or on farms, in the early part of the century — and while the precise word choices vary, these critics just haven't really listened to people around them — people generally beneath the notice of high-minded critics. Dated these stories may be, but the natural quality of the characters and the conversation remains. Dr. Keller almost invariably wrote about either the "common" or the "uncommon self-made" man; he did not despise education by any means, but his stories show his feeling that our general education process does not usually equip one for actual living very well. And he was drawing not upon his imagination, or upon his reading, but his first-hand experience with all sorts and conditions of people.

You have highly praised the two stories of his that we have run in *MOH*. We hope to bring you more. And, while not yet utterly weary of this body we're wearing, we do look forward to seeing him and arguing some points in his stories when the time comes.

*Robert A. W. Lowndes*

# The Lair of the Star-Spawn

by August Derleth & Mark Schorer

*(The extraordinary paper, now for the first time published below, was found among the private documents of the late Eric Marsh, whose death followed so suddenly upon his return from that mysterious expedition into Burma, from which only he returned alive almost three decades ago.)*

## 1

IF THERE EVER be a reader to this, my first and only word on that matter which has robbed me of all hope of security in this world, I ask him only to read what I have written, and then, if he is incredulous, to go himself to that mountainous expanse of Burma deep in its most secret places and see there the wreck

of the greenstone city in the center of the Lake of Dread on the long-lost Plateau of Sung. And if he is not yet satisfied, to go to the village of Bangka in the province of Shan-si and ask for the philosopher and scientist, Doctor Fo-Lan, once far-famed among the scholars of the world and now lost to them of his own volition. Doctor Fo-Lan may tell what I will not. For I write in the hope of forgetting; I want to put away from me for all time the things that I chronicle in this document.

Well within the memory of my generation, the Hawks Expedition set out for the little-explored secret fastnesses of Burma. In all the newspapers of the world was announced, not three months after the set-

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by permission of Arkham House.

It is hard for the editor to realize fully that each issue of MOH will be read by some people who have never previously seen the name AUGUST DERLETH, so that some sort of introduction serves a purpose somewhat greater than just courtesy to a fine gentleman and author and publisher. He was introduced to the public in the May 1926 issue of WEIRD TALES, with a story entitled *Bat's Belfry*; two issues later, readers saw a second story signed by the new author, but this time there was an added name: MARK SCHORER. Between that issue of WT and the issue of September 1947, carrying *The Occupant of the Crypt*, there were 19 stories bearing the team name; while Derleth alone had over 100 short stories and novelets in WEIRD TALES. To say that anything like a complete listing of his published works would take up more pages than the present story would be to exaggerate, perhaps, but not to give an entirely false impression. He is widely known for his regional novels, outside of field of imaginative fiction; within the field, while his stories have been generally appreciated, he is best known for single-handedly having perpetuated the memory of H. P. Lovecraft through his founding, with DONALD WANDREI, of Arkham House: Publishers. Emerging in 1939 with *The Outsider and Others*, the now-rare first large volume of Lovecraft stories, Arkham House has not only survived through years and trials which saw the foundering of many other publishing houses started by enthusiasts but has maintained its high standards of excellence in book production. The latest volume due from AH is *Colonel Markesan & Less Pleasant People*, by Derleth & Schorer, which will contain 14 of the collaborations in addition to the one you are about to read, and will sell for \$5.00. The address of Arkham House is Sauk City, Wisconsin 53583. We cannot close this introduction, however, without noting for the sake of newcomers that Mr. Derleth is also the author of a series of books dealing with the adventures of a detective by the name of Solar Pons, as related by his friend and colleague, Dr. Parker. If this sounds like a pastiche of Sherlock Holmes, you have received the correct impression — the Solar Pons series are regarded by innumerable Holmes addicts as the best series of pastiches yet offered to that public which can never tire of the Master Sleuth.

ting-out from New York, the tragic end of that expedition. In the files of any newspaper may be found the story of how the expedition was attacked by what were apparently bandits and killed to the last man, mercilessly and brutally, the party looted, and the bodies left exposed to the hot un-

wavering rays of the Burma sun. In most chronicles, there were two additional details — the first telling of the discovery of the body of a native guide about a mile or more from the scene of the ghastly slaughter, and the second of the utter disappearance of Eric Marsh, student and assistant to Geof-

frey Hawks, famed explorer and scholar, whose life was lost in the unfortunate Burmese expedition.

I am Eric Marsh. My return was chronicled almost a month later, less sensationally, for which I am grateful. Yet, while these papers state the manner in which I found my way once more into civilization, they laugh at me a little when they say I will not talk, and condole with me a little less when they say that my mind is no longer sound. Perhaps my mind has been affected; I can no longer judge.

It is with the events of that period between the murderous attack on the Hawks Expedition and my own return to the known world with which this document is concerned. Of the beginning, I need tell little. For the very curious, there are the easily obtained periodical accounts. Let me only say at the outset that our attackers were not bandits. On the contrary, they were a horde of little men, the tallest of them no more than four feet, with singularly small eyes set deep in dome-like, hairless heads. These queer attackers fell upon the party and had killed men and animals with their bright swords almost before our men could extract their weapons.

MY OWN ESCAPE occurred

only through the merest chance. It had so happened that my superior, Hawks, had somehow lost his compass case, which he always carried at his side. We had been traveling no more than two hours that morning, and he knew that the case had been at his belt when we started. Some one had to go back, for the compasses were indispensable to us. We looked to one of the natives to return quickly along the trail, but to our surprise every native we had with us refused point-blank to return alone. A strange uneasiness had been current among them for all of the last day, ever since we had come within sight of the range of high hills where lay the so called lost Plateau of Sung. It is true that strange legends had reached us even before we had left Ho-Nan province, of a weird race of little people, to whom the natives applied the odd name, "Tcho-Tcho," supposedly living near or on the Plateau of Sung. Indeed, it had been our intention to pry into these legends if possible, despite the reticence and obvious fear of the natives; who looked upon the lost plateau as a place of evil.

Annoyed at this delay, and yet desirous of pushing on, Hawks was not favorable toward the plan that we all return, and in the end I volunteered to cover the distance



myself while the party went on more slowly until my return. I found the case of compasses without trouble lying in the center of our trail only five miles back, and veered my mount to rejoin the party. A mile away, I heard their screams, and the few shots they were enabled to fire. At the moment I was screened from view of the party by a low mound on which grew short bushes. I stopped the horse and dropped to the ground. I crawled slowly up the slope and looked across the flat land beyond to where the party was being massacred. Through my glasses I saw that the attackers outnumbered the party by at least four to one, that they had had a great advantage, for they had evidently attacked just as the party was stringing out to enter a defile at the base of the range of high hills beyond. I realized at once that I could do nothing to help. Consequently I remained hidden until the strange little men had vanished; then I rode cautiously forward to the scene of the carnage.

I found there only dead bodies; no living thing had been left behind. The cavalcade, I discovered at once, had been plundered, but fortunately for me, the marauders had taken neither food nor water, contenting themselves, curiously enough, with our

plans and implements. Thus I was without even a shovel with which I might have given my companions something like a burial.

THERE WAS nothing left for me to do but to return to civilization; I could not go on alone. Consequently I took as many canteens of water and packets of food as I could carry on my horse, and started away.

I had one of two routes of return open to me: either I could go back the way we had come, and risk death on the long journey over uninhabited land, or I could forge ahead and cross the plateau and the high hills; for I knew that uninhabited land lay immediately beyond the range before me. The distance beyond the range was less than half that which I would have to recover, were I to retrace the party's course. Yet it was an unknown route, and there was danger of again encountering the little people whose ruthlessness I had witnessed. The factor that finally decided me was the still flowering hope that I might by some accident stumble upon the ruins of the forgotten city of Alaozar, which century-old legends traced to the plateau before me. Accordingly, I went ahead.

I had not gone far, following as best I could the direction

the compass indicated, when I heard a low call a little to my left. I pulled up my horse to listen. It came again, half call, half moan. Dismounting, I walked to the spot, and there I found the native whom the journals have mentioned as having made his way from the scene of the massacre. He was badly wounded in the abdomen by the same blades that had killed my companions, and he was obviously near death. I knelt beside him and raised his agonized body in my arms.

His eyes flashed recognition, and he stared up into my face as memory returned to him, and unutterable horror crossed his features. "Tcho-Tcho," he muttered. "Little men — from Lake of Dread . . . walled city."

I felt his body go limp in my arms, and, looking into his face, I thought him dead. I took his wrist in my hand and felt no pulse. Laying him carefully on the ground, I started away from him. As I walked through the low underbrush, a call much weaker than the first caused me to turn abruptly. The native was still lying on the ground, but his head was slightly raised with what must have been a tremendous effort, and one arm pointed weakly in the direction of the hills ahead.

"Not there!" he rasped, "Not . . . to . . . hills." Then he fell back, shuddering, and lay still.

For a moment I was disconcerted, but I could not afford to ponder his warning. I went on, toiling all afternoon up that ever-steepening slope before me, through almost impassable defiles and up sheer walls. Occasional trees, low, stunted growths, grew from the brush and wasteland, but these impeded my progress not at all.

WHEN I reached the crest of the range, the sun was setting. Looking into the red blaze that tinted the desolate expanse before me, the monotonous, uninhabited waste of unknown Burma, my mind reverted to the fate of my companions and my own plight. Grief mingled with fear of the oncoming night. But suddenly I started. Was it the sun in my eyes that created the strange sight which grew out of the wasteland far ahead on the Plateau of Sung? But as I continued to stare ahead, the moving red before my eyes dimmed away, and I knew that what I saw existed, was no illusion, no fantasm. Far away across the plateau on whose very edge I stood rose a grove of tall trees, and beyond the trees, yet set in their midst, I saw the walls and parapets of a city, red in the glare of the dying sun, rising alone in the plateau like a single monument in a burial ground. I hardly

dared believe what my mind thrust forward, yet there was no alternative — before me lay the long-lost city of Alaozar, the shunned dead city which for centuries had figured in the tales and legends of frightened natives!

Whether the city stood on an island and was surrounded by water — the Lake of Dread — as natives also believed, I could not tell, for it was at least five miles away, at a spot which I estimated should be the center of the Plateau of Sung. In the morning I would venture there, and go alone into the city deserted for centuries by men. The sun threw its last long rays over the waste expanse even as I looked toward the fabled city of Burma, and the shadows of dusk crept upon the plateau. The city faded from sight.

I HOBbled MY horse in a nearby spot where a reddish-brown grass grew, gave it as much of the water as I could spare, and prepared for the night. I did not sit long in the glow of my fire, for I was tired after my long climb, and sleep would wipe away or make less real the memory of my dead friends and the haunt-fear of danger. But when I lay down under the star-filled sky, I fell asleep not amid dreams of those dead, but of others — those who had gone

from Alaozar, the shunned and unknown.

How long I slept, I can not say. I awoke suddenly, almost at once alert, feeling that I was no longer alone. My horse was whinnying uncannily. Then, as my eyes became accustomed to the star-swept darkness, I saw something that brought all my senses to focus. Far ahead of me against the sky I saw a faint white line, flame-like, wavering up, up into the sky toward the distant stars. It was like a living thing, like an electrical discharge, surging always upward. And it came from somewhere on the plateau before me. Abruptly, I sat up. The white line came from the earth far ahead of me, in the spot where I had seen the city in the trees, or close beside it.

Then, as I looked, something happened to distract my attention from the light. A moving shadow crossed my vision and for an instant blotted out the wavering line ahead. At the same moment my horse neighed suddenly, wildly, and shied away, tearing at the rope which held him. There was some one close to me — man or animal, I could not tell.

Even as I started to rise to my feet something struck me a crushing blow on the back of my head. The last thing I knew was a faint, far-away knowledge that around me

there was suddenly the sound of many little feet pattering, pressing close to me. Then I sank into blackness.

## 2

I AWOKE in a bed.

When last I had lain down to sleep on the Plateau of Sung, I know I had been over a day's journey from even the roughest native mats; yet I awoke in a bed, and instinctively I knew that only a comparatively short time had passed since the mysterious attack made on me.

For some moments I lay perfectly still, not knowing what danger might lurk near me. Then I essayed to move about. There was still a sharp pain in my head. I put up my hand to feel the wound I felt sure must be there — and encountered a bandage! My exploring fingers told me that it was not only a skillful bandage but also a thoroughly done job. Yet I could not have been taken out of the secret fastnesses of Burma in such a short time, could not have been moved to civilization!

But my ruminations were cut short, for abruptly a door opened into the room, and a light entered. I say a light entered, for that is exactly the impression I got. It was an ordinary lamp, and it seemed to float along without human

guidance. But as it came closer, I saw that it was held aloft by a very little man, certainly of that same company which had only so recently slain the men and animals of the Hawks Expedition! The creature advanced solemnly and put the lamp, which gave off a weird green light, on a stone table near the bed in which I lay. Then I saw something else.

In my amazement, I had failed to notice the man who walked behind the creature carrying the lamp. Now, when the little man bowed suddenly in his direction, and scurried away, closing the door of the room behind him, I saw what in proportion to my first visitor seemed a giant. Yet the man was in reality only slightly over six feet in height.

He stood at the side of my bed, looking down at me in the glow of the green lamp. He was a Chinese, already well past middle age. His green-white face seemed to leap out from the black of his gown, and his white hands with their long, delicate fingers seemed to hang in black space. On his head he wore a black skull-cap, from beneath the rim of which projected a few straggling white hairs.

For a few moments he stood looking down at me in silence. Then he spoke, and to my astonishment, addressed me in flawless English.



"How do you feel now, Eric Marsh?"

The voice was soft, sibilant, pleasant. The man, I felt, was a doctor; I looked at him more intently, seeking to draw him closer. There was something alarmingly familiar about his face.

"I feel better," I said. "There is still slight pain." The man offered no comment, and I went on, after a brief pause. "Can you tell me where I am? How do you know my name?"

My strange visitor closed his eyes reflectively for a moment; then again came his soft voice. "Your baggage is here; it identifies you." He paused. Then he said, "As to where you are, perhaps if I told you, you would not know. You are in the city of Alaozar on the Plateau of Sung."

Yes, that was the explanation. I was in the lost city, and it was not deserted. Perhaps I should have guessed that the strange little people had come from this silent city. I said, "I know." Abruptly, as I looked at the impassive face above me, a memory returned. "Doctor," I said, "you remind me of a certain dead man."

His eyes gazed kindly at me; then he looked away, closing his eyes dreamily. "I had not hoped that any one might remember," he murmured. "Yet . . . of whom do I remind you, Eric Marsh?"

"Of Doctor Fo-Lan, who was murdered at his home in Peiping a few years ago."

He nodded almost imperceptibly. "Doctor Fo-Lan was not murdered, Eric Marsh. His brother was left there in his stead, but he was kidnapped and taken from the world. I am Doctor Fo-Lan."

"These little people," I murmured. "They took you?" I thought for a fleeting instant of his standing among them. "Then you are not their leader?"

The suggestion of a smile haunted Fo-Lan's lips. "Leader," he repeated. "No, I am their servant. I serve Tcho-Tcho people in one of the most diabolic schemes ever formulated on the face of the earth!"

The astonished questions that came to my lips were abruptly quieted by the silent opening of the door, and the entrance of two of the Tcho-Tcho people. At the same moment, Doctor Fo-Lan said, as if nothing had happened, "You will rest until tonight. Then we will walk about Alaozar; this has been arranged for you."

One of the little people spoke crisply in a language I did not understand; I did however, catch the name "Fo-Lan." The doctor turned without a further word and left the room,

and the two Tcho-Tcho people followed him.

Presently the door opened once more, and food and drink were brought me. From that time until Fo-Lan returned at dusk, I was not interrupted again.

THE SHORT WALK in the streets of Alaozar which followed fascinated me. Fo-Lan led me first to his apartments, which were not far from the room in which I had spent the day, and there allowed me to look out over the city and to the plateau beyond. I saw at once that the walled city was indeed on an island in the midst of a lake, the surface of which was covered by heavy moving mists, present, I was informed, all day long despite the burning sun. The water, where it could be seen, was green-black, the same strange color of the ancient masonry that made up the city of Alaozar.

Fo-Lan at my side said, "Not without base do ancient legends of China speak of the long-lost city on the Isle of the Stars in the Lake of Dread."

"Why do they call it the Isle of the Stars?" I asked, looking curiously at Fo-Lan.

The doctor's expression was inscrutable. He hesitated before answering, but finally spoke. "Because long before the time of man, strange be-

ings from the stars — from Rigel, Betelgeuze — the stars in Orion, lived here. And some of them — *live here yet!*"

I was nonplussed at the intensity of his voice, and then I did not understand, did not dream of his meaning. "What do you mean?" I asked.

He made a vague gesture with his hands, and with his eyes bade me be cautious. "You were saved from death only so that you might help me," Fo-Lan said. "And I, Eric Marsh, have for years been helping these little people, directing them to penetrate the deep and unknown caverns beneath the Lake of Dread and the surrounding Plateau of Sung where Lloigor and Zhar, ancient evil ones, and their minions await the day when they can once more sweep over Earth to bring death and destruction and incredible age-old evil!"

I shuddered, and despite its monstrous and unbelievable implications, I felt truth in Fo-Lan's amazing statement. Yet I said, "You do not speak like a scientist, Doctor."

He gave a curt brittle laugh. "No," he replied, "not as you understand a scientist. But what I knew before I came to this place is small in comparison to what I learned here. And the science that men in the outer world know even now is nothing but a child's

mental play. Hasn't it sometimes occurred to you that after all we may be the play-things of intelligences so vast that we are unable to conceive them?"

FO-LAN MADE a slight gesture of annoyance and silenced the protest on my lips with a sign. Then we began the descent into the streets. Only when I was outside, standing in the narrow streets scarcely wide enough for four men walking abreast, did I realize that Fo-Lan's apartment was in the highest tower in Aloazar, to which, indeed, the other turrets were very small in comparison. There were few high buildings, most of them crouching low on the ground. The city was very small, and took up most of the island, save for a very inconsiderable fringe of land just beyond the ancient walls, on which grew the trees I had seen at sunset the day before, trees which I now noticed were different from any others I had ever seen, having a strange reddish-green foliage and green-black trunks. The sibilant whispering of their curious leaves accompanied us in our short walk, and it was not until we were once more in Fo-Lan's apartment that I remembered there had been no wind of any kind; yet the leaves had moved continually! Then, too, I remarked upon

the scarcity of the Tcho-Tcho people.

"There are not many of them," Fo-Lan said, "but they are powerful in their own way. Yet there are curious lapses in their intelligence. Yesterday, for instance, after spying your party from the top of this tower, and after going out and annihilating it, they returned with two of their number dead; they had been shot. The Tcho-Tcho people could not believe them dead, since it is impossible for them to conceive of such a weapon as a gun. At base, they are a very simple people; yet they are inherently malevolent, for they know that they are working for the destruction of all that is good in the world."

"I do not quite understand," I said.

"I can feel that you do not believe in this monstrous fable," Fo-Lan replied. "How can I explain it to you; you are bound by conventions long established? Yet I will try. Perhaps you wish to think that it is all a legend; but I will offer you tangible proof that there is more than legend here.

"EONS AGO, a strange race of elder beings lived on Earth; they came from Rigel and Betelgeuze to take up their abode here and upon other planets. But they were followed by

those who had been their slaves on the stars, those who had set up opposition to the Elder Ones — the evil followers of Cthulhu, Hastur the Unspeakable, Lloigor and Zhar, the twin Obscenities, and others. The Ancient Ones fought these evil beings for possession of Earth, and after many centuries, they conquered. Hastur fled into outer space, but Cthulhu was banished to the lost sea kingdom of R'lyeh, while Lloigor and Zhar were buried alive deep in the inner fastnesses of Asia — beneath the accursed Plateau of Sungl

"Then the Old Ones, the Elder Gods, returned to the stars of Orion, leaving behind them ever-damned Cthulhu, Lloigor, Zhar, and others. But the evil ones left seeds on the plateau, on the island in the Lake of Dread which the Old Ones caused to be put there. And from these seeds have sprung the Tcho-Tcho people, the spawn of elder evil, and now these people await the day when Lloigor and Zhar will rise again and sweep over all Earth!"

I had to summon all my restraint to keep from shrieking my disbelief aloud. After some hesitation I forced myself to say in as calm a voice as I could assume, "What you have told me is impossible, Fo-Lan."

FO-LAN SMILED wearily.

He moved closer to me, put his hand gently on my arm, and said, "Have they never taught you, Eric Marsh, that there lives no man who may say what is possible and what not? What I have told you is true; it is impossible only because you are incapable of thinking of Earth in any terms but those suggested by the little science the outer world knows."

I felt myself rebuked. "And I must help you raise these dead things, penetrate the subterranean caverns below Alaozar and bring up the creatures that lie there to destroy Earth?" I asked incredulously.

Fo-Lan looked at me impassively. Then his voice sank to a whisper, and he said, "Yes . . . and no. The Tcho-Tcho people believe you will help me to raise them, and so they must continue to believe; but you and I, Eric Marsh . . . you and I are going to destroy the things below!"

I was bewildered. For a moment I entertained the idea that my companion was mad. "Two of us — against a host of creatures and the Tcho-Tcho people — and our only weapon my gun, wherever that is?"

Fo-Lan shook his head. "You anticipate me. You and I will be but the instruments; through us the things below will die."



"You are speaking in riddles, Doctor," I said.

"Nightly for many months I have tried to call for help with the force of my mind, have tried to get through the cosmos to those who alone can help in the titanic struggle before us. Last night I found a way, and soon I myself will go forth and demand the assistance we need."

"Still I do not understand," I said.

FO-LAN CLOSED his eyes for a moment. Then he said, "You do not want to understand me, or are you afraid to. I am suggesting that by telepathy I will summon help from those who first fought the things imprisoned below us."

"There exists no proof of telepathy, Doctor."

It was a foolish thing to say, as Fo-Lan immediately pointed out to me. He smiled, a little scornfully. "Try to throw off your shackles, Eric Marsh. You come to a place you did not know existed, and you see things which are to you impossible; yet you seek to deny something so close and conceivable as telepathy."

"I'm sorry," I said. "I'm afraid I'm not going to be much of a help to you. How am I to help you? And how will you go forth?"

"You are to watch over my

body when I travel upward to seek the help of those above."

Dimly, intelligence began to come to me. "Last night," I murmured, "out there on the plateau, I saw a white line wavering into the sky."

Fo-Lan nodded. "That was the way," he said, "made visible by the power of my desire. Soon I shall travel it."

I leaned forward eagerly, wanting to ask him a score of questions. But Fo-Lan held up his hand for silence. "Have you heard nothing, Eric Marsh?" he said. "All this while it has been growing."

The moment Fo-Lan mentioned it, I realized that I had heard something, had been hearing it ever since we had re-entered the doctor's apartment. It was a low humming, a disturbing sound as of a chant, which seemed to well up from far below, and yet seemed equally present from all sides. And at the same time I was conscious of a distinct atmospheric change, something which Fo-Lan did not perhaps notice, since he had been here now for years. It was a growing tension, a pressing, feverish tension in the chill night air. Slowly there grew in me a feeling of great fear; the very air, I felt, was noxious with cosmic evil.

"What is it?" I murmured.

Fo-Lan did not answer. He appeared to be listening in-

tently to the chant or humming sound mounting from below, smiling to himself. Then he looked cryptically at me and abruptly stepped to the outer wall. There he pulled hard at one of the ancient stones in the wall, and in a moment, a large section of the wall swung slowly inward, revealing a dark passage beyond, a secret way came swiftly back toward me, taking up one of the little green lamps with which I had once before come in contact, and lighting it as he spoke to me.

"I have not been idle in these past years. I fashioned that way myself, and only I know of it. Come, Eric Marsh; I will show you what no Tcho-Tcho suspects I have ever seen, what will silence all protest or disbelief in you."

THE STAIRS WHICH I found myself descending in a few moments led downward along the round wall of a shaft that pierced the earth. Down, down we went, feeling the walls on both sides of us with our hands. Fo-Lan carried the lamp in one hand, and its greenish glow served as illumination for our perilous journey, for the steps were uneven and steep. As we descended, the sounds from below grew noticeably louder. Now the humming sound was frequently cut into by another, the sound of many voices murmuring to-

gether in some long-forgotten language.

Then, abruptly, Fo-Lan stopped. He gave the lamp to me, and with a brief caution to me not to speak, gave his attention to the wall before him. Raising the lamp above my head, I saw that the stone steps went no farther, that we were, in fact, within two feet of solid masonry. Suddenly Fo-Lan reached back and extinguished the light, and at the same time I was conscious of an opening in the wall before us, where Fo-Lan had moved aside an old stone. "Look down, and with care," he whispered. Then he stepped aside, and I peered downward.

I looked into a gigantic cavern, illuminated by a huge green lamp seemingly suspended in space, and by at least a hundred smaller ones. The first thing that caught my eye was the horde of Tcho-Tcho people prostrate on the floor; it was from them that the low murmuring sound was coming. Then I saw an upright figure among them. It was that of a Tcho-Tcho man, slightly taller than the others, I thought, disfigured by a hump on his back, and incredibly old. He was stalking slowly forward, supported by a crooked black stick. Behind me, Fo-Lan, noticing the direction of my glance, murmured, "That is E-poh, leader of the Tcho-

Tcho people; he is seven thousand years old!" I could not help turning in utter surprise. Fo-Lan motioned forward. "You have seen nothing. Look beyond them, beyond E-poh, in the half-darkness forward, but do not cry out."

MY GAZE SWEPT those prostrate figures, passed beyond E-poh, and began to explore the dusk beyond. I think I must have been looking for some moments at the thing that crouched there before I actually realized it; that was because the creature was so large. I hesitate to write of it, for I can blame no one for not believing me. Yet it was there. I saw it first because my gaze fixed upon the green gleaming from its eyes. Then, abruptly, I saw it entirely. I thank Providence that the light was not strong, that only its vaguest outlines were clear to me, and I regret only that my innate doubt of Fo-Lan's strange story made the shock of this revelation accordingly sharper.

For the thing that crouched in the weird green dusk was a living mass of shuddering horror, a ghastly mountain of sensate, quivering flesh, whose tentacles, far-flung in the dim reaches of the subterranean cavern, emitted a strange humming sound, while from the depths of the creature's body came a weird and horrific ulu-

uation. Then I fell back into Fo-Lan's arms. My mouth opened to cry out, but I felt the doctor's firm hand clapped across my lips, and from a great distance I seemed to hear his voice.

*"That is Lloigor!"*

## 3

FO-LAN'S STORY was true!

I found myself suddenly in Fo-Lan's apartment. I know I must have climbed the long winding steps, but I do not remember climbing them, for the tumultuous thoughts that troubled me and the hideous memory of the thing I had seen served to drive from my mind all consciousness of what I was doing.

Fo-Lan came quickly away from the wall and stood before me, his face triumphant in the green lamplight. "For three years I have helped them penetrate the Earth, into the caverns below, have helped them in their evil purpose; now I shall destroy, and my dead brother will be avenged!" He spoke with an intensity I had not imagined him capable of.

He did not wait for any comment from me. Passing beyond me, he put the lamp down on a small table near the door. Then he went into the bedroom and lit another lamp; I saw its green light on the wall

as he came once more into the room where I stood.

"Mind," said Fo-Lan as he stood before me, "is all-powerful. Mind is everything, Eric Marsh. This evening you saw things of which you hesitated to speak, even before you saw the thing in the cavern below — Lloigor. You saw leaves move on trees — and they moved by the power of evil intelligences far below them, deep in the earth — a living proof of the existence of Lloigor and Zhar.

"E-poh has a mind of great power, but the knowledge I have endows me with greater power despite his tremendous age. Long hours I have sought to penetrate cosmic space, and so powerful has my mind become that even you could see the thought-thread that wavered upward from Alaozar last night! And mind, Eric Marsh, exists independent of body.

"I will wait no longer. Tonight I will go forth, now, while the worship is in progress. And you must watch my body."

Colossal as his plan was, I could only believe. What I had seen during the short space of my visit was unbelievable, impossible, yet *was*!

FO-LAN continued. "My body will rest on the bed in the chamber beyond, but my mind will go where I wish it

with a speed incomparable to anything we know. I will think myself on Rigel, and I shall be there. You must watch that none disturbs my body while I am gone. It will not be long."

Fo-Lan drew from his voluminous robe a small pistol, which I recognized immediately as one I had been carrying in my pack. "You will kill any one who tries to enter, Eric Marsh."

Beckoning me to follow him, Fo-Lan led the way into his chamber, and despite my feeble protest, stretched himself on the bed. Almost at once his body went rigid, and at the same moment I saw a gray outline of Fo-Lan standing before me, a smile on his thin lips, his eyes turned upward. Then he was gone, and I was alone with his body.

FOR OVER AN HOUR I sat in Fo-Lan's apartment, my terror mounting with each second. Only in that hour was I capable of approaching in my thoughts the cataclysmic horror which confronted the world if Fo-Lan was unsuccessful in his daring quest. Once, too, while I sat there, pattering footsteps halted beyond the outer door; then, to my unspeakable relief passed on. Toward the end of my watch, the abrupt cessation of the chanting sounds from below, followed by the noises of move-

ment throughout the island city, indicated that the worship was over. Then for the first time I left the chamber to take up my position at the outer door, where I stood, gun in hand, waiting for the interruptions my terrified mind told me must come.

But I never had cause to use the weapon, for suddenly I heard the sound of feet behind me. I whirled — and saw Fo-Lan! He had returned. He stood quietly, listening; then he nodded to himself and said, "We must leave Alaozar, Eric Marsh. Alone, we can not do it, and we have little time to waste. We must see E-poh, and have his permission to go beyond to the Plateau of Sung."

Fo-Lan moved forward now, and tugged at a long rope which hung quite near me along the wall. From somewhere far below there came the abrupt clang of a gong. Once more Fo-Lan pulled the rope, and again the gong sounded.

"That is to inform E-poh that I must speak to him about an urgent matter — concerning the things below."

"And your quest?" I asked. "Has it been successful?"

He smiled wryly. "It will be successful only if I can convince E-poh to open the way for Lloigor and Zhar and their countless hordes tonight — now! The way must be open, otherwise even the Star-War-

riors are helpless to penetrate Earth."

The sound of running feet in the corridor cut short my questions. The door opened inward and on the threshold I saw two of the Tcho-Tcho people, dressed in long green robes and wearing on their foreheads curious five-pointed star-designs. They ignored me completely, addressing themselves to Fo Lan. A rapid conversation in their strange language followed, and in a moment the two little people turned to lead the way.

Fo-Lan started after them, motioning me to follow. "From E-poh," he whispered. Then he added in a quick voice, "Be careful and speak no English before E-poh, for he understands it. Also, be certain you still have the gun, for E-poh will not let us go beyond Alaozar without an escort. And those little people you and I will have to kill."

We went rapidly down the corridor, and after a long descent, found ourselves on the street level, and deep in the tower. At last we entered an apartment similar in many respects to Fo-Lan's, but neither so small nor so civilized in its aspect. There we confronted E-poh, surrounded by a group of little people dressed similarly to our guides. Fo-Lan bowed low, and I did the same under the stress of those curi-

ous little eyes turned on me.

E-POH WAS SEATED on a sort of raised dais, suggestive of his leadership, but beyond the evidence of his great age in his lined face and his withered hands, and the servile attitude of the Tcho-Tcho people near him, there was no indication that he was the ruler of the little people around us.

"E-poh," said Fo-Lan, speaking in English for my benefit, "I have had intelligence from those below."

E-poh closed his eyes slowly, saying in a strange whistling voice, "And this intelligence — what is it, Fo-Lan?"

Fo-Lan chose to ignore his question, "Lloigor and Zhar themselves have spoken to my mind!" he said.

E-poh opened his eyes and looked at the doctor in disbelief. "Even to me Zhar has never spoken, Fo-Lan. How can it be that he has spoken to you?"

"Because I have fashioned the way, mine have been the hands that groped below and found Lloigor, and of greater age, and his word is law to those below."

"And what has Zhar communicated to you, Fo-Lan?"

"It is written below that tonight is the time when the buried ones wish to come forth, and it is decreed that the servants of E-poh must go

beyond Alaozar, beyond the Lake of Dread to the Plateau of Sung, there to await the coming of the Old Ones from below."

E-POH PEERED intently at Fo-Lan, his perplexity evident. "Tonight I spoke long with Lloigor. It is strange that he told me nothing of this plan, Fo-Lan."

Fo-Lan bowed again. "That is because the decision is Zhar's and of this Lloigor did not know until now."

"And it is strange that the Old Ones did not address themselves to me."

For a moment Fo-Lan hesitated; then he said, "That is because Zhar wishes me to go beyond Alaozar, to address those below Sung, while E-poh and his people must summon the Gods below from the towers and housetops of Alaozar. When Lloigor and Zhar have come above the Lake of Dread, then Eric Marsh and I must return to Alaozar, to plan for them the way beyond, into the outer world."

E-poh pondered this statement. In me uneasiness was beginning to grow when at last the Tcho-Tcho leader said, "It will be as you wish, Fo-Lan, but four of my people must go with you and the American."

Fo-Lan bowed. "It is pleasing to me that four others ac-

company us. But it is necessary also for us to take with us food and water, for there is no way of telling how many hours it may take the Old Ones to rise from below."

E-poh acquiesced without question.

Within a half-hour the six of us found ourselves pushing off the Isle of the Stars into the Lake of Dread, heavily shrouded in thick mists which gave off a strange putrescent odor. The barge-like boat in which we rode was strangely suggestive of ancient Roman galleys, yet very different. The Tcho Tcho people sculled their way across the lake, and in a few moments we had reached the opposite shore and were pushing rapidly across the Plateau of Sung.

WE HAD NOT gone far, when from behind us came a weird whistling call, then another, and finally a ghastly assembly was piping weirdly from the towers of Alaozar. And from below there came suddenly the terrifying sound of movements under the earth.

"They have opened the vast caverns below the city," murmured Fo-Lan, "and they are calling forth Lloigor and Zhar and those below them.

Then Fo-Lan looked swiftly around, calculating the distance we had covered. Abruptly he turned to me, whispering,

"Give me the gun; they will not hear in the city."

Silently I handed the doctor the weapon, and following his sign, backed away. Sharply the sound of the first shot cut into the night; immediately after, a second shot rang out. Two of our little companions were dead. But the other two, seeing what had happened to their companions, and sensing their own fate, jumped nimbly away, drawing their sharp little two-edged swords. Then, together, they came at Fo-Lan. The revolver spat again, and one of them went down, clawing wildly at the air. But the last of them came on — and the revolver jammed.

Fo-Lan leaped aside at the same instant that I flung myself forward, falling on the Tcho-Tcho man from behind. The force of my attack caused him to drop the weapon he held in his hand, and I thought for a moment that his death was certain. But I had reckoned without his strength. He whirled at once, catching me unaware, and with the greatest ease flung me five feet from him. But this short pause had been sufficient for Fo-Lan; darting forward, he seized the weapon the Tcho-Tcho man had dropped. Then, just as the little man turned, Fo-Lan plunged the weapon into his body. He dropped instantly.



I STAGGERED TO my feet, bruised from the shock of being thrown to the ground with such force; I had not imagined that these little men could be so powerful, despite Fo-Lan's early warning. Fo-Lan was standing quite still, an almost ecstatic smile on his face. I looked at him, and opened my lips to speak — and then a movement far behind him caught my eye. At the same instant Fo-Lan turned.

Far up in the sky a brilliant beam of light was growing — and it did not come from the earth! Then suddenly, so swiftly the light grew, the surrounding country was as light as day, and in the sky I saw countless hordes of strange, fiery creatures, apparently mounted on creatures of burden. The riders in the sky were oddly like men in construction, save that from their sides grew three pairs of flailing growths similar to arms, yet not arms, and in these growths they carried curious tube-like weapons. And in size these beings were monstrous.

"My God!" I exclaimed, when I could find my voice. "What is it, Fo-Lan?"

Fo-Lan's eyes were gleaming in triumph. "They are the Star-Warriors sent by the Ancient Ones from Orion. Up there they listened to my plea, for they know that Lloigor and Zhar and their evil spawn are deathless to man; they know

that only the ancient weapons of the Elder Gods can punish and destroy."

I looked once more into the sky. The glowing beings were now much closer, and I saw that the things they rode were limbless — that they were exactly like long tubes, pointed at both ends, travelling evidently only in the power of the ray of light emanating from the stars far above.

"The ululations from beneath the earth have guided them here — and now they will destroy!"

FO-LAN'S VOICE was drowned out abruptly by the terrific clamor that rose from Alaozar. For the Star-Warriors had surrounded the city, and now from their tube-like appendages shot forth great beams of annihilation and death! And the age-old masonry of Alaozar was crumbling into ruin. Then suddenly the Star-Warriors descended, entering into the city, and penetrating the vast caverns beneath.

And then two things happened. The entire sky began to glow with a weird purple light, and in the ray that descended from above I saw a file of beings even stranger than the Star-Warriors. They were great, writhing pillars of light, moving like tremendous flames, colored purple and white,

dazzling in their intensity. These gigantic beings from outer space descended swiftly, circling the Plateau of Sung, and from them great rays of stabbing light shot out toward the hidden fastnesses below. And at the same time, the earth began to tremble.

Shuddering, I put out my hand to touch Fo-Lan's arm. He was utterly unmoved, save in triumphant joy at the spectacle of the destruction of Alaozar. "The Ancient Ones themselves have come!" he cried out.

I remember wanting to say something, but I saw suddenly one of those inconceivable pillars of light bending over Fo-Lan and me, and I felt slithering tentacles gently reaching around me; then I knew no more.

There is little more to write. I came to my senses near Bangka, miles from the Plateau of Sung, and at my side was Fo-Lan, unhurt and smiling. We had been transported within the second by the Ancient God who had bent to save us from the destruction of the things beneath the earth.

## 4

THE STATEMENT of Eric Marsh ends thus abruptly. However, what surmises might be made from it, this paper will not state. Mr. Marsh had

appended to his curious statement several newspaper clippings, all of them dated within ten days of his appearance at Bangka, where he evidently stayed for a while with Doctor Fo-Lan before returning to America. There is room for only a brief summary of the clippings.

The first was from a Tokyo paper announcing the strange reappearance of Doctor Fo-Lan. Another clipping from the same issue of that paper tells of a curious electrical display witnessed from several observatories in the Orient, seemingly centered in its elemental force somewhere in Burma. Still another paragraph concerns an apparition (thus it is called) supposedly seen in the night during which Doctor Fo-Lan and Eric Marsh so mysteriously returned to Bangka; it was that of a gigantic pillar of light, towering far into the sky, and alive with movement; it was seen by forty-seven persons in and around Bangka.

The final clipping was dated ten days later; it was taken from an eminent London paper, and is the verbatim report of an aviator who flew over Burma in the endeavor to trace the source of a fetid odor which was sweeping the country, nauseating India and China for hundreds of miles around. The heart of this report is briefly:

"The odor I traced to the so-called Plateau of Sung, to which I was attracted by accidental sight of hitherto unknown ruins in the heart of the plateau. I found, to my amazement, that for some reason the earth of the plateau had been broken and torn up for its entire area, save for one spot not far from a deep cavern near the ruins, which bears evidence of once having been a lake. On this spot I

managed to effect a landing. I left the machine in order to determine the meaning of the great green-black masses of rotting flesh which greeted my eyes at once. But the odor forced a quick retreat. Yet this I know: the remains on the Plateau of Sung are those of what must have been gigantic animals, apparently boneless, and utterly unknown to man. And they must have met death in battle with mortal enemies!"



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# Proof

by S. Fowler Wright

S (idney) FOWLER WRIGHT is best known for his incomplete trilogy of which we have only *The Amphibians* and *The World Below*, although one may say that is quite a lot of "only", for these two novels are masterpieces of sardonic imaginative literature. Most popular of his novels is *Deluge*; its sequel, *Dawn*, is less well known. The present tale displays several of the most prominent facets of his talent.

THE PURSUIT OF knowledge is its own justification. At this distant day, looking dispassionately upon it, it is difficult to condemn, in its intention at least, the French revolution of 1793, which, unlike that of two centuries earlier which aimed at the elimination of a social caste, and in direct opposition to that of the Russian Bolsheviks which aimed at the removal of the intelligentsia, was intended to eradicate the inefficient and the

inadequate by the prompt and painless method of the guillotine.

The inception of the Act by which the French nation, ever supreme in logic and first in political experiment, affirmed its determination to eliminate its own stupidity, was due to the genius of M. Jules Bouchere, as it was due to his sustained and passionate eloquence as Premier that it was first carried and afterwards re-affirmed by two over-

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whelming votes in the Chamber of Deputies.

That it should have been necessary to re-affirm a decision the reasonableness of which was so obvious to intelligent people that to oppose it was to assert beyond argument their own unfitness to survive this sane and kindly inquisition, was due solely to the mis-directed energy and courage of M. Pierre Duclos, who was perhaps the only man alive in France at that day who could have done it without condemning himself in the first moment of opposition. For how could his country remove for stupidity a man whose dramatic work was admitted throughout the civilized world to have eclipsed both Shakespeare and Moliere, and to be equaled only by that of Ben Jonson and G. B. Shaw?

The first occasion of his opposition concerned the fate of a simple and patriotic Frenchman named Leroux, who had himself applied for condemnation. The man had come to the prison-gates of Rouen, saying, "I am too stupid to see the wisdom of what you are doing. When you eliminated my wife and my two sons I lacked sufficient patriotism to be really pleased, though their stupidity was a fact of which I had often told them. Remove my head for the glory of France."

The incident would have passed unnoticed, and the body

of Leroux would have been disconnected from a head which was unfit to direct it, had it not come to the knowledge of M. Duclos, who moved a resolution in the Chamber of Deputies that the man was not eligible for elimination, on the ground that he had shown unusual intelligence in applying for his own destruction.

The debate which followed was of exceptional interest, being conspicuous both for the sustained eloquence and the logical subtleties of the two great political protagonists. "How," asked M. Duclos, "if you advocate this appalling massacre, can you condemn for stupidity one who has sufficient wisdom to support your policy, and to approve it even to his own condemnation, which few could be found to do?"

"How," retorted M. Bouchere, "can you argue that when he offered himself to death he affirmed his wisdom, unless you are yourself prepared to approve the measure which would condemn him? Is Saul also among the prophets?"

Yet, after three days of such exchanges, M. Bouchere saw that there was sufficient feeling in favour of Leroux among his supporters to render it prudent for him to compromise the direct issue, which he did by proposing that the man should be placed under observation for a period of six months, to which

Duclos agreed very readily. "In six months," he was heard to mutter, "in six months you yourself . . ." His voice died in his beard.

But having made this concession, M. Bouchere promptly followed it by asking the Chamber for a policy which was steadily removing the inferior elements of the population of France, and this was carried with acclamation, the single vote of M. Duclos being recorded against it.

THE SECOND resolution of confidence in the Government, and in support of the policy with which its name is identified, was moved in a rather different atmosphere.

Four months of steady deletion had removed most of the more obviously unintelligent members of the community, leaving, however, a large number of dull or doubtful intellects which yet had sufficient intelligence to apprehend the peril ward them. The proportion of of selective elimination rose to such individuals in the civilization of that day, which had protected their youth, and been tolerant of the inefficiency of maturer years, was very considerable. There were many thousands of secretly apprehensive people who would gladly have agreed that a sufficient reduction had been made already. But there were few who would ad-

venture the perilous prominence that such a declaration would bring upon them, with its almost certain consequence; and there were still a large number who felt sufficiently secure in the reality of their attainments, or the fortress of their conceit, to look with complacency upon the surrounding slaughter.

There was another element which made it difficult to discontinue the executions. A vested interest is very quickly established. The judges and officials of the special courts which had been set up for the examination of the accused; the lawyers who were profitably occupied in the realization and distribution of their estates; the painters and repairers of guillotines; all the house-holders in the execution-squares who benefitted by the letting of windows, and the shopkeepers in the neighboring streets; all the publishers of improving literature, including those who had commenced the issue of incomprehensible periodicals which were very widely bought, because it was considered a form of life-insurance to be seen to read them; all these, and a thousand others, were too directly interested in the campaign of extermination to welcome any word that could be spoken against it.

M. Bouchere saw that the time had come when he must

ask once more for the confidence of the Chamber, while he could yet do it in the expectation that none but M. Duclos would have the temerity to vote against him.

Ascending the tribune, he spoke for over two hours without the interruption of dissent, in passionate defence and exaltation of the policy which was raising France to an intellectual level without precedent in the history of humanity — a level which must make its people pre-eminent among the races of mankind. The only thing which could cloud the issue, or diminish the triumph of the land they loved, would be that other nations should attempt to imitate a practice which they had lacked the courage or the imagination to be the first to institute. With a full knowledge of his responsibility, with a sense of the gravity of the words he uttered, he warned the world that the very suggestion of such a policy would be regarded as an unfriendly act, bringing war upon themselves — instant war, while yet the more stupid elements of their populations remained alive, to hamper their operations and confound their counsels. The intellectual eminence of France, which she had bought with the blood of millions, was a crown of glory which should be hers till the stars fell. . . . At this point, his words were lost in the deafening applause

of a Chamber which had leapt to its feet in a delirium of patriotic fervour. Only M. Duclos remained seated, silent and sardonic, meeting his opponent's eyes even at that moment with a smile of contemptuous derision.

M. Bouchere looked and saw. Was it not at this climax of triumph that he should strike, if ever, and annihilate his enemy? As the storm of applause died, he commenced again, addressing himself, as all might observe, directly to his solitary adversary, who continued to regard him silently with that expression of unchanged contempt, until he made some passing allusion to the speedy and painless exit which was allowed, by the mercy of France, to the citizens whose stupidity would otherwise have obscured her fame. Then there came from his lips one incredible word, clear and unmistakable. Looking full at the Premier, he ejaculated the unforgivable word *Fool*.

When the President's bell had done something to subdue the resultant hubbub, he addressed the delinquent with his usual dignity. He was sure that M. Duclos would wish to express his regret, and to withdraw an expression which it would not be customary to hear in such an Assembly.

M. Duclos replied that he hoped that he could never fail in respect to the Chamber, or



in obedience to the President's ruling. But his difficulty was that he had not used the word as a vulgar expletive, or in any offensive or abusive way. It was a considered opinion which he had long held, and which was convincingly illustrated by the remark which he had interrupted. He was of opinion that *M. Bouchere was a stupid man*.

The Chamber sat for one silent moment, as though stunned by the audacity of that attack not merely upon the political position, but upon the life of its leader. The next was pandemonium. But the President had seized that moment of silence with his customary coolness and promptitude, and had adjourned the Assembly.

AT THE NEXT meeting of the Chamber, after the Premier's vote of confidence had been carried with the usual single dissident, M. Bouchere rose confidently to submit a further notion to the Assembly that M. Duclos should be directed to withdraw the offensive expression which he had used against him, with a suitable apology for its use, and should then be required to absent himself from the House while his position would be considered by his fellow-members.

"But," M. Duclos interjected cheerfully, "I do not propose

to withdraw. I propose to justify it."

The President intervened. Did M. Duclos appreciate the gravity of the position which he was taking up?

M. Duclos said that he did. He asserted with confidence that M. Bouchere was a stupid man. If he could not prove it, they could call him by the same name.

M. Bouchere, always quick and accurate in gauging the temper of the Assembly, saw that it would be useless to attempt to avoid the issue, which promised members a much superior entertainment to anything which could be gained from the rebuke or expulsion of one of their number for an unseemly word. He replied confidently that he repudiated the charge, and challenged his accuser to justify it.

M. Duclos asked if it would not demonstrate his stupidity if it could be shown that he had instituted a revolution so terrible and so bloody without having sufficient intelligence to understand its consequences?

M. Bouchere, without committing himself to this general proposition, denied that he had failed to do so. Let M. Duclos be specific in accusation, and he would know how to reply.

M. Duclos was quite willing to be specific. Had not M. Bouchere committed himself to the random and proofless statement

that the form of execution to which he was subjecting all the obtuser members of the community resulted in a particularly speedy and painless death? Might not such an assertion, made without proof, and in defiance of probability, be accurately described as the words of a stupid man?

The Premier answered in genuine surprise at the weakness of the accusation which had been made against him. There was no doubt that decapitation involved an instantaneous and probably quite painless dissolution. It was obvious for detailed argument among intelligent men.

But his opponent held to his point. How did M. Bouchese know, or why should he suppose, that consciousness was discontinued in the severed head, which remained uninjured, with its organs of sight and hearing unimpaired, though the means of producing sound or motion might be no longer available?

M. Bouchere replied, with more patience than could have been expected, that the fact that the head was severed from the supply of blood on which it depended would alone be sufficient to produce an instantaneous oblivion. Was it not common knowledge that the mere slackening of the heart's supply to the brain would produce unconsciousness, as in the

common experience of a faint or swoon? How much more . . . ?

"There are few things more painful," M. Duclos replied, "than to hear a man of reputed intelligence asserting that of which he has no knowledge, and discussing that of which he is ignorant, with an assumption of his own finality." Would M. Bouchere reconcile this convenient theory with the vociferations of the domestic hog, when subjected to the familiar surgical operation which introduced it to its violent — he would not say to its untimely — end? Vociferations which were continued (though in a scale which descended with some rapidity) for a sufficient time to demonstrate to any intelligent and impartial mind that the diversion of the stream of life from its accustomed channel did not produce the unconsciousness which had been assumed by the facile stupidity — yes, he would not shirk the word, the only adequate word — of the man who had misguided France. He, at least, did not make random assertion. He did not mislead the assembly with the temerity of a proofless word. The demonstration was at the door.

As he spoke these words, his voice was drowned by the shrill discordant protests of a quadruped whose unwilling rotundity was dragged forward to the

central floor of the chamber, beneath the eyes of members too astonished, or (it may be), too interested to protest against this unprecedented invasion.

We may consider the scene which followed with averted eyes. It is enough to say that the pig died at the hands of its attendant butcher, as so many of its ancestors had done before it, though in obscurer surroundings. Enough to record that it emphasized its objection in the usual manner, and, to the inward consternation of M. Bouchere, that it continued its protests, though with a descending liveliness, even when the stream of life had slackened from its deflated body. In a final demonstration, and with a cruelty which must be justified, if at all, by the gravity of the dependant issue, the deputies witnessed the butcher's weapon driven once again into the neck of an animal that was squealing faintly, as in a dream, and observed the note to rise again in a reanimated though momentary protest against this final indignity.

The pig died, and the originator of this astonishing demonstration looked at his opponent with a smile of sardonic satisfaction. But M. Bouchere had now had time to consider his position. He ascended the tribune to denounce with real or simulated indignation the inde-

cent folly which would expose that Assembly to the contempt or derision of an hilarious world. He touched a note that stirred an approving murmur when he asked with passionate scorn if M. Duclos considered it a seeming thing to make comparison between his country-men — and his country-women — even the more stupid among them, and the domestic hog? But he was obviously disconcerted, though for a moment only, by the sharp interjection of his opponent: "Then you shouldn't serve them in the same way."

But he went on, when he felt that he had secured the ear of the Assembly, to ridicule the absurdity, as he condemned the indecency, of the demonstration which had been thrust upon them. Was not every school-child familiar with the theory of reflex actions? Was there consciousness in the words of delirium? In the antics of which some people were guilty in the dentist's chair?

What might have resulted had it been left to M. Duclos to reply can be a matter of conjecture only, for M. Pardieu, a deputy who had been recently disappointed in a well-founded expectation of office, succeeded in gaining the President's eye as the Premier descended from the tribune, and was the next to address the Assembly. He said briefly that

the question which M. Duclos had raised was too serious to be dismissed while its answer was a matter of conjecture only. The thought that the baskets of Frenchman's heads that were removed at the end of the daily operations in the market-places of a hundred cities might include those who were still retaining a horrified consciousness of the fate which had befallen upon them — might even be suffering a physical agony of severed nerves which they were powerless to express or communicate — was not one which could be left unanswered, however stupid these persons might have been shown to be. . . . He suggested a simple experiment by which the question could be finally settled, and he proposed the judgment upon the conduct of M. Duclos, and of the accusation which he had made against the Premier should alike be suspended in the meantime, and this solution was accepted unanimously.

JACQUES MOULINS was a man of an exceptional stupidity, who could not have escaped the inquisition for so many months had he not possessed a substantial fortune, which he used as freely as was possible to one of his avaricious and parsimonious nature to secure his safety. When he was selected, after exhaustive inquiry,

as a particularly suitable subject for the proposed experiment, his fate was certain, for the evidences of his stupidity were abundant, and there were few, if any, in his native village, who were not able and willing to bear witness against him.

Convicted of a dense and somewhat mulish stupidity, he was informed, during the few hours which intervened between the inevitable sentence and its execution upon him, that his wealth would be handed over to a brother who had a reputation for shrewdness which would justify such an allocation (but with whom he was known to have had a bitter quarrel) unless he should succeed in winking with his right eye when asked to do so, three minutes after his head had been detached in the usual manner. Should he do this, however, his money would be distributed among his children in accordance with his dispositions, and the French laws of inheritance.

The experiment was conducted in the sight of many thousands of people, and with a scrupulous fairness. M. Moulin was enjoined to fix his thoughts upon the wink which he would be required to perpetrate under such unusual disadvantages. When, with a characteristic stupidity, he began to struggle as he was being fastened to the board which

would enable his neck to be presented to the guillotine at the appropriate angle, he was put on one side for a few moments to enable him to compose his mind, and, when the knife descended, his head was not allowed to fall into the usual receptacle, but the executioner had it grasped by the hair, so that he could place it at once upon a tureen or dish which had been provided in readiness, and which was of such a shape that it would remain upright upon it, almost as though it were rising from a natural collar.

The three minutes passed in a breathless silence. The executions were suspended. Even the seven stupid persons who were awaiting their own decapitations may not have been entirely indifferent to the result of an experiment which was intended to demonstrate the nature of the experience which they were also to undergo. A hundred binoculars were directed upon that passive, bloodless head. The cinematographic operators stood in readiness. The appointed official said in a slow, clear voice, of a suitable gravity: *"Jacques Moulins, if you desire that your property should be distributed according to your dispositions, and the laws of inheritance, I adjure you to wink with your right eye."*

There were five seconds of

tense expectancy, while every gaze was concentrated upon that ghastly visage, and then, slowly, steadily, completely, the left eye closed.

There was no doubt of that. Closed it remained. In that condition, with the right eye opened, and the left closed, it was subjected to the snapping of a hundred cameras. With a stupidity which persisted in death, Jacques Moulins had closed the wrong eye.

In doing this, he had given his hoarded wealth to be the lawyers' sport. He had started litigation which still persists, though his brother and children have gone to their destined ends, and of the money itself there is little — but that is another story.

THE NEXT DAY came, and the revolution of 1984 was an ended thing. Without change of law, without administrative order, it had ceased to function. The force which destroyed it was a common instinct of revulsion at which M. Duclos may have aimed when he led the attention of the nation to be concentrated upon the end of its victims rather than upon the benefits which their deaths were supposed to bring. Before it ceased, it had been responsible for the deaths of 1,777,230 men, 1,183,026 women, and 11,314 children. Its influence upon the average intelligence

of the people of France is a matter of history. But there was to be one more dramatic episode in the Chamber of Deputies before the curtain fell.

M. Bouchere might have been well content to forget the challenge which had been thrust upon him, but his opponent held to his point with an unswerving determination. Speaking with a deliberate obtuseness, as though the administration of the law were being continued with its past severity, he claimed that the Premier should submit himself to its decision on the accusation of stupidity which he had brought against him — a motion which M. Pardieu was very quick to second.

So accused, and on the issue of the experiment which had been agreed between them, M. Bouchere was unable to avoid the trial. Nor, in the changed temper of France, in its moment of sharp reaction, could there be any doubt of the verdict. The jury was unanimous in its decision that M. Bouchere had shown himself to be a stupid man.

So there was to be one more demonstration of the efficiency of the guillotine in raising the intellectual standard of the race — an unavoidable demonstration, for how could M. Bouchere ask for himself a mercy which he had denied to al-

most three millions of his fellow-citizens? And it was at this point that M. Duclos intervened again — not to obstruct the doom which he may have felt it to be particularly fitting that the man should himself experience who had caused it to fall upon so many, but to offer the problematic advantage of a further experiment.

It appeared that a chemist of his acquaintance had invented a certain glutinous substance of which he asserted that, if it were smeared upon the knife of the guillotine immediately before it descended, it would prevent effusion of the blood both from the head and trunk of the separated individual, and protect them also from any septic atmospheric contagion. He suggested that, under such conditions, it should not be beyond the resources of the surgical science of the day (as much in advance of that of fifty years earlier as that had been in advance of the practice of the previous century) to reunite the severed body, and M. Bouchere might survive both to relate his experience, and to acquire the wisdom which he now lacked.

As the drowning man will clutch at the useless straw, so did M. Bouchere at this unexpected gluepot, though it was offered by the hand of him who had contrived his downfall.

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THE MAN COULD be seen for many years selling boot-laces at a street-corner in the Rue de la Paix. There was a scar round his neck. He did a good trade with the foreign tourists. He was undoubtedly of weak or disordered intellect. It was supposed to have been the result of an unusual shock.

He is said to have died in the epidemic of 2002.

. . . He always said that the experience had been like a pleasant dream, beyond which he had no memory to recall. It would be of interest, if he could be regarded as a reliable witness — but suppose that he said it only that he might annoy M. Duclos?



## The Reckoning

When we score your ballots, we keep a running account of the relative position of the stories with each one, so we can tell at any moment not only how the contents of an issue stand at the moment, but how the stories placed from the very first ballot received. Thus, we can see at a glance that the Austin Hall novelet was put in first place at the beginning, tied with the Howard story momentarily; was knocked out of first place twice, for no more than a ballot or two, by the Scotten tale; then moved back into the top position and held firmly there from then on.

Roger Zelazny's short-short was easily the most controversial in the issue, and, in fact, the most controversial for some time. The "outstanding" and "first place" votes exceeded the "dislike" votes; and the two extreme reactions accounted for something less than half of the ballots received; but the general complex was such as to keep the tale from rating as highly as the enthusiastic faction would like to see it. (Your editor included.)



# The Vacant Lot

by Mary Wilkins-Freeman

(author of *Louella Miller, The Shadows on the Wall*)

The present tale by MARY E. WILKINS-FREEMAN, like the two others that we have presented in MOH, comes from her collection entitled *The Wind in the Rose-Bush*; we need only say that while the individual elements in the story may be conventional enough in themselves, the manner in which they are put together is entirely original.

WHEN IT BECAME generally known in Townsend Center that the Townsends were going to move to the city, there was great excitement and dismay. For the Townsends to move was about equivalent to the town's moving. The Townsend ancestors had founded the village a hundred years ago. The first Townsend had kept a wayside hostelry for man and beast, known as the "Sign of

the Leopard." The signboard, on which the leopard was painted a bright blue, was still extant, and prominently so, being nailed over the present Townsend's front door. This Townsend, by name David, kept the village store. There had been no tavern since the railroad was built through Townsend Center in his father's day. Therefore the family, being ousted by the march of pro-

gress from their chosen employment, took up with a general country store as being the next thing to a country tavern, the principal difference consisting in the fact that all the guests were transients, never requiring bedchambers, securing their rest on the tops of sugar and flour barrels and codfish boxes, and their refreshment from stray nibblings at the stock in trade, to the profitless deplendishment of raisins and loaf sugar and crackers and cheese.

The flitting of the Townsends from the home of their ancestors was due to a sudden access of wealth from the death of a relative and the desire of Mrs. Townsend to secure better advantages for her son George, sixteen years old, in the way of education, and for her daughter Adrianna, ten years older, better matrimonial opportunities. However, this last inducement for leaving Townsend Center was not openly stated, only ingeniously surmised by the neighbors.

"Sarah Townsend don't think there's anybody in Townsend Center fit for her Adrianna to marry, and so she's goin' to take her to Boston to see if she can't pick up somebody there," they said. Then they wondered what Abel Lyons would do. He had been a humble suitor for Adrianna for years, but her mother had not approved, and

Adrianna, who was dutiful, had repulsed him delicately and rather sadly. He was the only lover whom she had ever had, and she felt sorry and grateful; she was a plain, awkward girl, and had a patient recognition of the fact.

But her mother was ambitious, more so than her father, who was rather pugnaciously satisfied with what he had, and not easily disposed to change. However, he yielded to his wife and consented to sell out his business and purchase a house in Boston and move there.

David Townsend was curiously unlike the line of ancestors from whom he had come. He had either retrograded or advanced, as one might look at it. His moral character was certainly better, but he had not the fiery spirit and eager grasp at advantage which had distinguished them. Indeed, the old Townsends, though prominent and respected as men of property and influence, had reputations not above suspicion. There was more than one dark whisper regarding them handed down from mother to son in the village, and especially was this true of the first Townsend, he who built the tavern bearing the Sign of the Blue Leopard. His portrait, a hideous effort of contemporary art, hung in the garret of David Townsend's home. There

was many a tale of wild roistering, if no worse, in that old roadhouse, and high stakes, and quarreling in cups, and blows, and money gotten in evil fashion, and the matter hushed up with a high hand for inquirers by the imperious Townsends who terrorized everybody.

David Townsend terrorized nobody. He had gotten his little competence from his store by honest methods — the exchanging of sterling goods and true weights for country produce and country shillings. He was sober and reliable, with intense self-respect and a decided talent for the management of money. It was principally for this reason that he took great delight in his sudden wealth by legacy. He had thereby greater opportunities for the exercise of his native shrewdness in a bargain. This he evinced in his purchase of a house in Boston.

ONE DAY in spring the old Townsend house was shut up, the Blue Leopard was taken carefully down from his lair over the front door, the family chattels were loaded on the train, and the Townsends departed. It was a sad eventful day for Townsend Center. A man from Barre had rented the store — David had decided at the last not to sell — and the old familiars congregated in melancholy fashion and

talked over the situation. An enormous pride over their departed townsman became evident. They paraded him, flaunting him like a banner in the eyes of the new man.

"David is awful smart," they said; "there won't nobody get the better of him in the city if he has lived in Townsend Center all his life. He's got his eyes open. Know what he paid for his house on Boston? Well, sir, that house cost twenty-five thousand dollars, and David he bought it for five. Yes, sir, he did."

"Must have been some out about it," remarked the new man, scowling over his counter. He was beginning to feel his disparaging situation.

"Not an out, sir. David he made sure on't. Catch him gettin' bit. Everythin' was in apple-pie order, hot an' cold water and all, and in one of the best locations of the city — real high-up street. David he said the rent in that street was never under a thousand. Yes, sir, David he got a bargain — five thousand dollars for a twenty - five - thousand - dollar house."

"Some out about it!" growled the new man over the counter.

However, as his fellow townsmen and allies stated, there seemed to be no doubt about the desirableness of the city house which David Townsend had purchased and the fact

that he had secured it for an absurdly low price. The whole family were at first suspicious. It was ascertained that the house had cost a round sum only a few years ago; it was in perfect repair; nothing whatever was amiss with plumbing, furnace, anything. There was not even a soap factory within smelling distance, as Mrs. Townsend had vaguely surmised. She was sure that she had heard of houses being undesirable for such reasons, but there was no soap factory. They all sniffed and peeked; when the first rainfall came they looked at the ceiling, confidently expecting to see dark spots where the leaks had commenced, but there were none. They were forced to confess that their suspicions were allayed, that the house was perfect, even overshadowed with the mystery of a lower price than it was worth. That, however, was an additional perfection in the opinion of the Townsends, who had their share of New England thrift.

They had lived just one month in their new house, and were happy, although at times somewhat lonely from missing the society of Townsend Center, when the trouble began. The Townsends, although they lived in a fine house in a genteel, almost fashionable, part of the city, were true to their

antecedents and kept, as they had been accustomed, only one maid. She was the daughter of a farmer on the outskirts of their native village, was middle-aged, and had lived with them for the last ten years. One pleasant Monday morning she rose early and did the family washing before breakfast, which had been prepared by Mrs. Townsend and Adrianna, as was their habit on washing-days. The family was seated at the breakfast table in their basement dining-room, and this maid, whose name was Cordelia, was hanging out the clothes in the vacant lot. This vacant lot seemed a valuable one, being on a corner. It was rather singular that it had not been built upon. The Townsends had wondered at it and agreed that they would have preferred their own house to be there. They had, however, utilized it as far as possible with their innocent, rural disregard of property rights in unoccupied land.

"We might just as well hang out our washing in that vacant lot," Mrs. Townsend had told Cordelia the first Monday of their stay in the house. "Our little yard ain't half big enough for all our clothes, and it is sunnier there, too."

SO CORDELIA had hung out the wash there for four

Mondays, and this was the fifth. The breakfast was about half finished — they had reached the buckwheat cakes — when this maid came rushing into the diningroom and stood regarding them, speechless, with a countenance indicative of the utmost horror. She was deadly pale. Her hands, sodden with soapsuds, hung twitching at her sides in the folds of her calico gown; her very hair, which was light and sparse, seemed to bristle with fear. All the Townsends turned and looked at her. David and George rose with a half-defined idea of burglars.

"Cordelia Battles, what is the matter?" cried Mrs. Townsend. Adrianna gasped for breath and turned as white as the maid. "What is the matter?" repeated Mrs. Townsend, but the maid was unable to speak. Mrs. Townsend, who could be peremptory, sprang up, ran to the frightened woman and shook her violently. "Cordelia Battles, you speak," said she, "and not stand there staring that way, as if you were struck dumb! What is the matter with you?"

Then Cordelia spoke in a fainting voice.

"There's — somebody else — hanging out clothes — in the vacant lot," she gasped, and clutched at a chair for support.

"Who?" cried Mrs. Townsend, rousing to indignation, for already she had assumed a proprietorship in the vacant lot.

"Is it the folks in the next house? I'd like to know what right they have! We are next to that vacant lot."

"I — dunno — who it is," gasped Cordelia.

"Why, we've seen that girl next door go to mass every morning," said Mrs. Townsend. "She's got a fiery red head. Seems as if you might know her by this time, Cordelia."

"It ain't that girl," gasped Cordelia. Then she added in a horror-stricken voice, "I could n't see who t'was."

They all stared.

"Why couldn't you see?" demanded her mistress. "Are you struck blind?"

"No, ma'am."

"Then why couldn't you see?"

"All I could see was . . ." Cordelia hesitated, with an expression of the utmost horror.

"Go on," said Mrs. Townsend, impatiently.

"All I could see was the shadow of somebody, very slim, hanging out the clothes, and . . ."

"What?"

"I could see the shadows of the things flappin' on their line."

"You couldn't see the clothes?"

"Only the shadow on the ground."

"What kind of clothes were they?"

"Queer," replied Cordelia, with a shudder.

"If I didn't know you so well,

I should think you had been drinking," said Mrs. Townsend. "Now, Cordelia Battles, I'm going out in that vacant lot and see myself what you're talking about."

"I can't go," gasped the woman.

WITH THAT Mrs. Townsend and all the others, except Adrianna, who remained to tremble with the maid, sallied forth into the vacant lot. They had to go out the area gate into the street to reach it. It was nothing unusual in the way of vacant lots. One large poplar tree, the relic of the old forest which had once flourished there, twinkled in one corner; for the rest, it was overgrown with coarse weeds and a few dusty flowers. The Townsends stood just inside the rude board fence which divided the lot from the street and stared with wonder and horror, for, Cordelia had told the truth. They all saw what she had described — the shadow of an exceedingly slim woman moving along the ground with upstretched arms, the shadows of strange, nondescript garments flapping from a shadowy line, but when they looked up for the substance of the shadows nothing was to be seen except the clear, blue October air.

"My goodness!" gasped Mrs. Townsend. Her face assumed a strange gathering of wrath in

the midst of her terror. Suddenly she made a determined move forward, although her husband strove to hold her back.

"You let me be," said she. She moved forward. Then she recoiled and gave a loud shriek. "The wet sheet flapped in my face," she cried. "Take me away, take me away!" Then she fainted. Between them they got her back to the house. "It was awful," she moaned when she came to herself, with the family all around her where she lay on the dining-room floor. "Oh, David, what do you suppose it is?"

"Nothing at all," replied David Townsend stoutly. He was remarkable for courage and staunch belief in actualities. He was now denying to himself that he had seen anything unusual.

"Oh, there was," moaned his wife.

"I saw something," said George, in a sullen, boyish bass.

The maid sobbed convulsively and so did Adrianna for sympathy.

"We won't talk any about it," said David. "Here, Jane, you drink this hot tea — it will do you good; and Cordelia, you hang out the clothes in our own yard. George, you go and put up the line for her."

"The line is out there," said George, with a jerk of his shoulder.

"Are you afraid?"

"No, I ain't," replied the boy resentfully, and went out with a pale face.

After that Cordelia hung the Townsend wash in the yard of their own house, standing always with her back to the vacant lot. As for David Townsend, he spent a good deal of his time in the lot watching the shadows, but he came to no explanation, although he strove to satisfy himself with many.

"I guess the shadows come from the smoke from our chimneys, or else the poplar tree," he said.

"Why do the shadows come on Monday mornings, and no other?" demanded his wife.

David was silent.

VERY SOON new mysteries arose. One day Cordelia rang the dinner-bell at their usual dinner hour, the same as in Townsend Center, high noon, and the family assembled. With amazement Adrianna looked at the dishes on the table.

"Why, that's queer!" she said.

"What's queer?" asked her mother.

Cordelia stopped short as she was about setting a tumbler of water beside a plate, and the water slopped over.

"Why," said Adrianna, her face paling, "I — thought there was boiled dinner. I — smelt cabbage cooking."

"I knew there would some-

thing else come up," gasped Cordelia, leaning hard on the back of Adrianna's chair.

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Townsend sharply, but her own face began to assume the shocked pallor which it was so easy nowadays for all their faces to assume at the merest suggestion of anything out of the common.

"I smelt cabbage cooking all the morning up in my room," Adrianna said faintly, "and here's codfish and potatoes for dinner."

The Townsends all looked at one another. David rose with an exclamation and rushed out of the room. The others waited tremblingly. When he came back his face was lowering.

"What did you . . ." Mrs. Townsend asked hesitatingly.

"There's some smell of cabbage out there," he admitted reluctantly. Then he looked at her with a challenge. "It comes from the next house," he said. "Blows over our house."

"Our house is higher."

"I don't care; you can never account for such things."

"Cordelia," said Mrs. Townsend, "you go over to the next house and you ask if they've got cabbage for dinner."

Cordelia switched out of the room, her mouth set hard. She came back promptly.

"Says they never have cabbage," she announced with gloomy triumph and a conclu-



sive glance at Mr. Townsend.  
"Their girl was real sassy."

"Oh, father, let's move away; let's sell the house," cried Adrianna in a panic-stricken tone.

"If you think I'm going to sell a house that I got as cheap as this one because we smell cabbage in a vacant lot, you're mistaken," replied David firmly.

"It isn't the cabbage alone," said Mrs. Townsend.

"And a few shadows," added David. "I am tired of such nonsense I thought you had more sense, Jane."

"One of the boys at school asked me if we lived in the house next to the vacant lot on Wells Street and whistled when I said 'Yes,'" remarked George.

"Let him whistle," said Mr. Townsend.

After a few hours the family, stimulated by Mr. Townsend's calm, common sense, agreed that it was exceedingly foolish to be disturbed by a mysterious odor of cabbage. They even laughed at themselves.

"I suppose we have got so nervous over those shadows hanging out clothes that we notice every little thing," conceded Mrs. Townsend.

"You will find out some day that that is no more to be regarded than the cabbage," said her husband.

"You can't account for that wet sheet hitting my face," said Mrs. Townsend, doubtfully.

"You imagined it."

"I felt it."

THAT AFTERNOON things went on as usual in the household until nearly four o'clock. Adrianna went downtown to do some shopping. Mrs. Townsend sat sewing beside the bay window in her room, which was a front one in the third story. George had not got home. Mr. Townsend was writing a letter in the library. Cordelia was busy in the basement; the twilight, which was coming earlier and earlier every night, was beginning to gather, when suddenly there was a loud crash which shook the house from its foundations. Even the dishes on the sideboard rattled, and the glasses rang like bells. The pictures on the walls of Mrs. Townsend's room swung out from the walls. But that was not all: every looking-glass in the house cracked simultaneously — as nearly as they could judge — from top to bottom, then shivered into fragments over the floors.

Mrs. Townsend was too frightened to scream. She sat huddled in her chair, gasping for breath, her eyes, rolling from side to side in incredulous terror, turned toward the street. She saw a great black group of people crossing it just in front of the vacant lot. There was something inexpressibly strange and gloomy about this moving group; there was an ef-

fect of sweeping, wavings and foldings of sable draperies and gleams of deadly white faces; then they passed. She twisted her head to see, and they disappeared in the vacant lot. Mr. Townsend came hurrying into the room; he was pale, and looked at once angry and alarmed.

"Did you fall?" he asked inconsequently, as if his wife, who was small, could have produced such a manifestation by a fall.

"Oh, David, what is it?" whispered Mrs. Townsend.

"Darned if I know!" said David.

"Don't swear. It's too awful. Oh, see the looking-glass, David!"

"I see it. The one over the library mantel is broken, too."

"Oh, it is a sign of death!"

Cordelia's feet were heard as she staggered on the stairs. She almost fell into the room. She reeled over to Mr. Townsend and clutched his arm. He cast a sidewise glance, half furious, half commiserating at her.

"Well, what is it all about?" he asked.

"I don't know. What is it? Oh, what is it? The looking-glass in the kitchen is broken. All over the floor. Oh, oh! What is it?"

"I don't know any more than you do. I didn't do it."

"Lookin' glassess broken is a sign of death in the house," said Cordelia. "If it's me, I hope I'm ready; but I'd rather die than be so scared as I've been lately."

Mr. Townsend shook himself loose and eyed the two trembling women with gathering resolution.

"Now, look here, both of you," he said. "This is nonsense. You'll die sure enough of fright if you keep on this way. I was a fool myself to be startled. Everything it is is an earthquake."

"Oh, David!" gasped his wife, not much reassured.

"It is nothing but an earthquake," persisted Mr. Townsend. "It acted just like that. Things always are broken on the walls, and the middle of the room isn't affected. I've read about it."

SUDDENLY Mrs. Townsend gave a loud shriek and pointed. "How do you account for that," she cried, "if it's an earthquake? Oh, oh, oh!"

She was on the verge of hysterics. Her husband held her firmly by the arm as his eyes followed the direction of her rigid pointing finger. Cordelia looked also, her eyes seeming converged to a bright point of fear. On the floor in front of the broken looking-glass lay a mass of black stuff in a gruesome long ridge.

"It's something you dropped there," almost shouted Mr. Townsend.

"It ain't. Oh!"

Mr. Townsend dropped his wife's arm and took one stride toward the object. It was a very long crepe veil. He lifted it, and it floated out from his arm as if imbued with electricity.

"It's yours," he said to his wife.

"Oh, David, I never had one. You know, oh, you know I — shouldn't — unless you died. How came it there?"

"I'm darned if I know," said David, regarding it. He was deadly pale, but still resentful rather than afraid.

"Don't hold it; don't!"

"I'd like to know what in thunder all this means?" said David. He gave the thing an angry toss and it fell on the floor in exactly the same long heap as before.

Cordelia began to weep with racking sobs. Mrs. Townsend reached out and caught her husband's hand, clutching it hard with ice-cold fingers.

"What's got into this house, anyhow?" he growled.

"You'll have to sell it. Oh, David, we can't live here."

"As for my selling a house I paid only five thousand for when it's worth twenty-five, for any such nonsense as this, I won't!"

David gave one stride to-

ward the black veil, but it rose from the floor and moved away before him across the room at exactly the same height as if suspended from a woman's head. He pursued it, clutching vainly, all around the room, then he swung himself on his heel with an exclamation and the thing fell to the floor again in the long heap. Then were heard hurrying feet on the stairs and Adrianna burst into the room. She ran straight to her father and clutched his arm; she tried to speak, but she chattered unintelligibly; her face was blue. Her father shook her violently.

"Adrianna, do have more sense!" he cried.

"Oh, David, how can you talk so?" sobbed her mother.

"I can't help it. I'm mad!" said he with emphasis. "What has got into this house and you all, anyhow?"

"What is it, Adrianna, poor child," asked her mother. "Only look what has happened here."

"It's an earthquake," said her father staunchly; "nothing to be afraid of."

"How do you account for *that*?" said Mrs. Townsend in an awful voice, pointing to the veil.

ADRIANNA did not look — she was too engrossed with her own terrors. She began to speak in a breathless voice.

"I — was coming — by the

vacant lot," she panted, "and — I — I had my new hat in a paper bag and — a parcel of blue ribbon, and — I saw a crowd, an awful — oh! a whole crowd of people with white faces, as if — they were dressed all in black."

"Where are they now?"

"I don't know. Oh!" Adrianna sank gasping feebly into a chair.

"Get her some water, David," sobbed her mother.

David rushed with an impatient exclamation, out of the room and returned with a glass of water which he held to his daughter's lips.

"Here, drink this!" he said roughly.

"Oh, David, how can you speak so?" sobbed his wife.

"I can't help it. I'm mad clean through," said David.

Then there was a hard bound upstairs, and George entered. He was very white, but he grinned at them with an appearance of unconcern.

"Hullo!" he said in a shaking voice, which he tried to control. "What on earth's to pay in that vacant lot now?"

"Well, what is it?" demanded his father.

"Oh, nothing, only — well, there are lights over it exactly as if there was a house there, just about where the windows would be. It looked as if you could walk right in, but when you look close there are those

old dried-up weeds rattling away on the ground the same as ever. I looked at it and couldn't believe my eyes. A woman saw it, too. She came along just as I did. She gave one look, then she screeched and ran. I waited for some one else, but nobbody came."

Mr. Townsend rushed out of the room.

"I daresay it'll be gone when he gets there," began George, then he stared round the room. "What's to pay here?" he cried.

"Oh, George, the whole house shook all at once, and all the looking-glasses broke," wailed his mother, and Adrianna and Cordelia joined.

George whistled with pale lips. Then Mr. Townsend entered.

"Well," asked George, "see anything?"

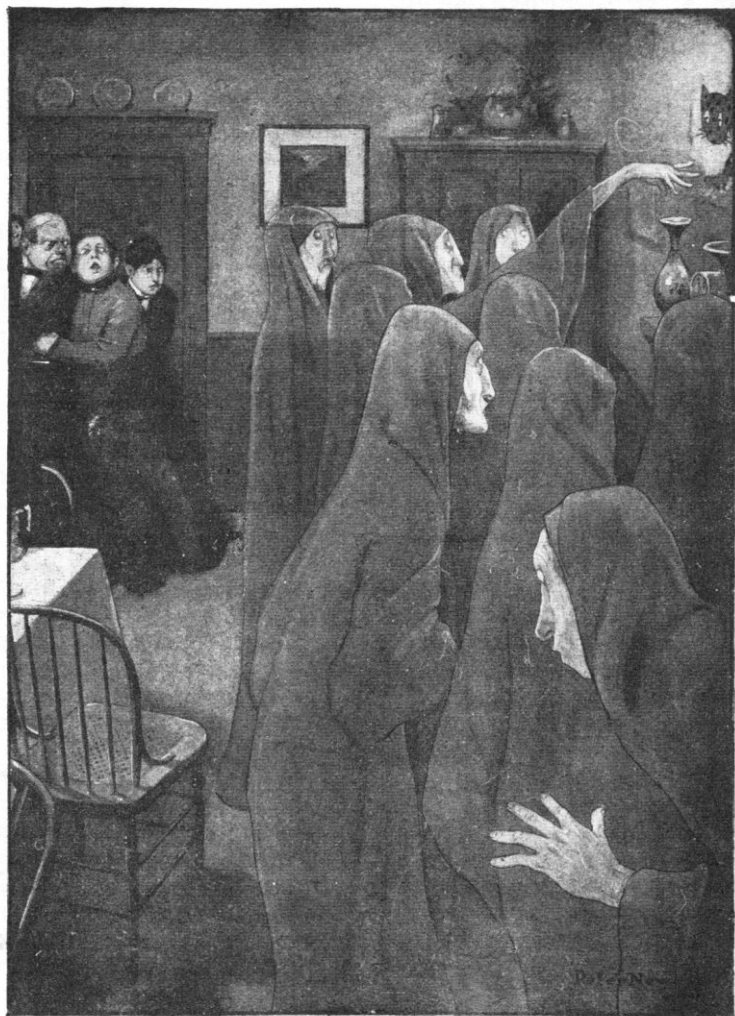
"I don't want to talk," said his father. "I've stood just about enough."

"We've got to sell out and go back to Townsend Center," cried his wife in a wild voice.

"Oh, David, say you'll go back."

"I won't go back for any such nonsense as this, and sell a twenty-five thousand dollar house for five thousand," said he firmly.

But that very night his resolution was shaken. The whole family watched together in the dining-room. They were all afraid to go to bed — that is, all



"A black-draped long arm was seen to rise and make a motion"

except possibly Mr. Townsend. Mrs. Townsend declared firmly that she for one would leave that awful house and go back to Townsend Center whether he came or not, unless they all stayed together and watched, and Mr. Townsend yielded. They chose the dining-room for the reason that it was nearer the street should they wish to make their egress hurriedly, and they took up their station around the dining-table on which Cordelia had placed a luncheon.

"It looks exactly as if we were watching with a corpse," she said in a horror-stricken whisper.

"Hold your tongue if you can't talk sense," said Mr. Townsend.

THE DINING-ROOM was very large, finished in oak, with a dark blue paper above the wainscoting. The old sign of the tavern, the Blue Leopard, hung over the mantelsheff. Mr. Townsend had insisted on hanging it there. He had curious pride in it. The family sat together until after midnight and nothing unusual happened. Mrs. Townsend began to nod; Mr. Townsend read the paper ostentatiously. Adrianna and Cordelia stared with roving eyes about the room, then at each other as if comparing notes on terror. George had a book which he studied furtively. All at

once Adrianna gave a startled exclamation and Cordelia echoed her. George whistled faintly. Mrs. Townsend awoke with a start and Mr. Townsend's paper rattled to the floor.

"Look!" gasped Adrianna.

The Townsends with one accord rose and huddled together in a far corner; they all held to each other and stared. The people, their faces gleaming with a whiteness of death, their black robes waving and folding, crossed the room. They were a trifle above mortal height, or seemed so to the terrified eyes which saw them. They reached the mantel-shelf where the signboard hung, then a black-draped long arm was seen to rise and make a motion, as if plying a knocker. Then the whole company passed out of sight, as if through the wall, and the room was as before. Mrs. Townsend was shaking in a nervous chill, Adrianna was almost fainting, Cordelia was in hysterics. David Townsend stood in a curious way at the sign of the Blue Leopard. George stared at him with a look of horror. There was something in his father's face which made him forget everything else. At last he touched his arm timidly.

"Father," he whispered.

David turned and regarded him with a look of rage and fury, then his face cleared; he

passed his hand over his forehead.

"Good Lord! What *did* come to me?" he muttered.

"You looked like that awful picture of old Tom Townsend in the garret in Townsend Center, Father," whimpered the boy, shuddering.

"Should I might look like 'most any old cuss after such darned work as this," growled David, but his face was white. "Go and pour out some hot tea for your mother," he ordered the boy sharply. He himself shook Cordelia violently. "Stop such actions!" he shouted in her ears, and shook her again. "Ain't done nothin' wrong, have ye?"

Then Cordelia quoted Scripture in a burst of sobs and slaughter.

"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me," she cried out. "If I ain't done wrong, mebbe them that's come before me did, and when the Evil One and the Powers of Darkness is abroad I'm liable, I'm liable!" Then she laughed loud and long shrill.

"If you don't hush up," said David, but still with that white terror and horror on his own face, "I'll bundle you out in that vacant lot whether or no. I mean it."

Then Cordelia was quiet, after one wild roll of her eyes to him. The color was returning to Adrianna's cheeks; her moth-

er was drinking hot tea in spasmodic gulps.

"It's after midnight," she gasped, "and I don't believe they'll come again tonight. Do you, David?"

"No, I don't," said David conclusively.

"Oh, David, we mustn't stay another night in this awful house."

"We won't. Tomorrow we'll pack off bag and baggage to Townsend Center, if it takes all the fire department to move us," said David.

Adrianna smiled in the midst of her terror. She thought of Abel Lyons.

THE NEXT DAY Mr. Townsend went to the real estate agent who had sold him the house.

"It's no use," he said, "I can't stand it. Sell it for what you can get. I'll give it away rather than keep it."

Then he added a few strong words as to his opinion of parties who sold him such an establishment. But the agent pleaded innocent for the most part.

"I'll own I suspected something wrong when the owner, who pledged me to secrecy as to his name, told me to sell that place for what I could get, and did not limit me. I had never heard anything, but I began to suspect something was wrong. Then I made a few inquiries



and found out that there was a rumor in the neighborhood that there was something out of the usual about that vacant lot. I had wondered myself why it wasn't built upon. There was a story about it's being undertaken once, and the contract made, and the contractor dying; then another man took it and one of the workmen was killed on his way to dig the cellar, and the others struck. I didn't pay much attention to it. I never believed much in that sort of thing anyhow, and then, too, I couldn't find out there had ever been anything wrong about the house itself, except as to the people who lived there were said to have seen and heard queer things in the vacant lot, so I thought you might be able to get along, especially as you didn't look like a man who was timid, and the house was such a bargain as I never handled before. But this you tell me is beyond belief."

"Do you know the names of the people who formerly owned the vacant lot?" asked Mr. Townsend.

"I don't know for certain," replied the agent, "for the original owners flourished long before your's or my day, but I do know that the lot goes by the name of the old Gaston lot. What's the matter? Are you ill?"

"No; it's nothing," replied Mr. Townsend. "Get what you can for the house; perhaps another family might not be as troubled as we have been."

"I hope you are not going to leave the city?" said the agent, urbanely.

"I am going back to Townsend Center as fast as steam can carry me after we get packed up and out of that cursed house," replied Mr. David Townsend.

He did not tell the agent nor any of his family what had caused him to start when told the name of the former owners of the lot. He remembered all at once the story of a ghastly murder which had taken place in the Blue Leopard. The victim's name was Gaston and the murderer had never been discovered.

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# Comes Now The Power

by Roger Zelazny

(author of *But Not the Herald*, *Divine Madness*)

Many months ago, ROGER ZELAZNY sent us three short-short stories. At that time we were very heavily overstocked with new fiction for MOH to which we had committed ourselves, and we advised the author that while we loved all three of his offerings, and would like to use all three, a great strain would be put upon his patience if we were to do so; we proposed, if he felt heroic, to use them in the order in which you have seen them in MOH — he agreed to undergo the trial. Here, then, is the last of the trio, quite different from the second, as the second was from the first — and, of course, not designed as a trio in the first place.

IT WAS INTO the second year now, and it was maddening.

Everything which had worked before failed this time.

Each day he tried to break it, and it resisted his every effort.

He snarled at his students, drove recklessly, bloodied his knuckles against many walls. Nights, he lay awake cursing.

But there was no one to

whom he could turn for help. His problem would have been non-existent to a psychiatrist, who doubtless would have attempted to treat him for something else.

So he went away that summer, spent a month at a resort: nothing. He experimented with several hallucinogenic drugs: again, nothing. He tried free-associating into a tape recorder, but all he got when he

played it back was a headache.

To whom does the holder of a blocked power turn, within a society of normal people?

... To another of his own kind, if he can locate one.

Milt Rand had known four other persons like himself: his cousin Gary, now deceased; Walker Jackson, a Negro preacher who had retired to somewhere down South; Tatya Stefanovich, a dancer, presently somewhere behind the Iron Curtain; and Curtis Legge, who, unfortunately, was suffering a schizoid reaction, paranoid type, in a State institution for the criminally insane. Others, he had brushed against in the night, but had never met and could not locate now.

There had been blockages before, but Milt had always worked his way through them inside of a month. This time was different and special, though. Upsets, discomforts, disturbances can damn up a talent, block a power. An event which seals it off completely for over a year, however, is more than a mere disturbance, discomfort, or upset.

The divorce had beaten hell out of him.

It is bad enough to know that somewhere someone is hating you; but to have known the very form of that hatred and to have proven ineffectual against it, to have known it

as the hater held it for you, to have lived with it and felt it growing around you, this is more than distasteful circumstance. Whether you are offender or offended, when you are hated and you live within the circle of that hate, it takes a thing from you: it tears a piece of spirit from your soul, or, if you prefer, a way of thinking from your mind; it cuts and does not cauterize.

Milt Rand dragged his bleeding psyche around the country and returned home.

He would sit and watch the woods from his glassed-in back porch, drink beer, watch the fireflies in the shadows, the rabbits, the dark birds, an occasional fox, sometimes a bat.

He had been fireflies once, and rabbits, birds, occasionally a fox, sometimes a bat.

The wildness was one of the reasons he had moved beyond suburbia, adding an extra half hour to his commuting time.

Now there was a glassed-in back porch between him and these things he had once been part of. Now he was alone.

Walking the streets, addressing his classes at the Institute, sitting in a restaurant, a theater, a bar, he was vacant where once he'd been filled.

There are no books which tell a man how to bring back the power he has lost.

He tries everything he can think of, while he is waiting.

WALKING THE hot pavements of a summer noon, crossing against the lights because traffic is slow, watching kids in swimsuits play around a gurgling hydrant, filthy water sluicing the gutter about their feet, as mothers and older sisters in halters, wrinkled shirts, bermudas and sunburnt skins watch them, occasionally, while talking to one another in entranceways to buildings or the shade of a storefront awning, Milt moves across town, heading nowhere in particular, growing claustrophobic if he stops for long, his eyebrows full of perspiration, sunglasses streaked with it, shirt sticking to his sides and coming loose, sticking and coming loose as he walks.

Amid the afternoon, there comes a time when he has to rest the two fresh-baked bricks at the ends of his legs. He finds a treelawn bench flanked by high maples, eases himself down into it and sits there thinking of nothing in particular for perhaps twenty-five minutes.

— Hello.

Something within him laughs or weeps.

Yes, hello, I am herel Don't go away! Stay! Please!

— You are — like me . . .

— Yes, I am. You can see it in me because you are what you are. But you must read here and send here, too. I'm

frozen. I — Hello? Where are you?

Once more, he is alone.

He tries to broadcast. He fills his mind with the thoughts and tries to push them outside his skull.

— Please come back! I need you. You can help me. I am desperate. I hurt. Where are you?

Again, nothing.

He wants to scream. He wants to search every room in every building on the block.

Instead, he sits there.

At 9:30 that evening they meet again, inside his mind.

Hello?

— Stay! Stay, for God's sake! Don't go away this time! Please don't! Listen, I need you! You can help me.

— How? What is the matter?

— I'm like you. Or was, once. I could reach out with my mind and be other places, other things, other people. I can't do it now, though. I have a blockage. The power will not come. I know it is there. I can feel it. But I can't use . . . Hello?

— Yes, I am still here. I can feel myself going away, though. I will be back. I . . .

Milt waits until midnight. She does not come back. It is a feminine mind which has touched his own. Vague, weak, but definitely feminine, and wearing the power. She does not come back that night,

though. He paces up and down the block, wondering which window, which door . . .

He eats at an all-night diner, returns to his bench, waits, paces again, goes back to the diner for cigarettes, begins chain-smoking, goes back to the bench.

Dawn occurs, day arrives, night is gone. He is alone, as birds explore the silence, traffic begins to swell, dogs wander the lawns.

Then weakly, the contact:

*— I am here. I can stay longer this time, I think. How can I help you? Tell me.*

*— All right. Do this thing: Think of the feeling, the feeling of the out-go, out-reach, out-know that you have now. Fill your mind with that feeling and send it to me, as hard as you can.*

It comes upon him then as once it was: the knowledge of the power. It is earth and water, fire and air to him. He stands upon it, he swims in it, he warms himself by it, he moves through it.

*— It is returning! Don't stop now!*

*— I'm sorry. I must. I'm getting dizzy . . .*

*— Where are you?*

*— Hospital . . .*

He looks up the street to the hospital on the corner, at the far end, to his left.

*— What ward?* he frames the

thought but knows she is already gone, even as he does it.

DOPED-UP OR feverish, he decides, and probably out for awhile now.

He takes a taxi back to where he had parked, drives home, showers and shaves, makes breakfast, cannot eat.

He drinks orange juice and coffee and stretches out on the bed.

Five hours later he awakens, looks at his watch, curses.

All the way back into town, he tries to recall the power. It is there like a tree, rooted in his being, branching behind his eyes, all bud, blossom, sap and color, but no leaves, no fruit. He can feel it swaying within him, pulsing, breathing; from the tips of his toes to the roots of his hair he feels it. But it does not bend to his will, it does not branch within his consciousness, furl there its leaves, spread the aromas of life.

He parks in the hospital lot, enters the lobby, avoids the front desk, finds a chair beside a table filled with magazines.

Two hours later he meets her.

He is hiding behind a copy of HOLIDAY and looking for her.

*— I am here.*

*— Again, then! Quickly! The power! Help me to rouse it!*

She does this thing.

Within his mind, she conjures

the power. There is a movement, a pause, a movement, a pause. Reflexively, as though suddenly remembering an intricate dance step, it stirs within him, the power.

As in a surfacing bathyscaphe, there is a rush of distortions, then a clear, moist view without.

She is a child, who has helped him.

A mind-twisted, fevered child, dying . . .

He reads it all when he turns the power upon her.

Her name is Dorothy and she is delirious. The power came upon her at the height of her illness, perhaps because of it.

Has she helped a man come alive again, or dreamed that she helped him? she wonders.

She is thirteen years old and her parents sit beside her bed. In the mind of her mother a word rolls over and over, senselessly, blocking all other thoughts, though it cannot keep away the feelings:

— *Metho-trexate, meth-otrexate, methotrex-ate, meth . . .*

In Dorothy's thirteen-year old breastbone there are needles of pain. The fevers swirl within her, and she is all but gone to him.

She is dying of leukemia. The final stages are already arrived. He can taste the blood in her mouth.

Helpless within his power, he projects:

— *You have given me the end of your life and your final strength. I did not know this. I would not have asked it of you if I had.*

— *Thank you, she says, for the pictures inside you.*

— *Pictures?*

— *Places, things I saw . . .*

— *There is not much inside me worth showing. You could have been elsewhere, seeing better.*

— *I am going again . . .*

— *Wait!*

He calls upon the power that lives within him now, fused with his will and his senses, his thoughts, memories, feelings. In one great blaze of life, he shows her Milt Rand.

— *Here is everything I have, all I have ever been that might please: Here is swarming through a foggy night, blinking on and off. Here is lying beneath a bush as the rains of summer fall about you, drip from the leaves upon your fox-skin fur. Here is the moon-dance of the deer, the dream drift of the trout beneath the dark swell, blood cold as the waters about you.*

*Here is Tatya dancing and Walker preaching; here is my cousin Gary, as he whittles, contriving a ball within a box, all out of one piece of wood. This is my New York and my*

*Paris. This, my favorite meal, drink, cigar, restaurant, park, road to drive on late at night; this is where I dug tunnels, built a lean-to, went swimming; this, my first kiss; these are the tears of loss; this is exile and alone, and recovery, awe, joy; these, my grandmother's daffodils; this, her coffin, daffodils about it; these are the colors of the music I love, and this is my dog who lived long and was good. See all the things that heat the spirit, cool within the mind, are encased in memory and one's self. I give them to you, who have no time to know them.*

He sees himself standing on the far hills of her mind. She laughs aloud then, and in her room somewhere high away a hand is laid upon her and her wrist is taken between fingers and thumb as she rushes to ward him suddenly grown large. His great black wings sweep forward to fold her wordless spasm of life, then are empty.

Milt Rand stiffens within his power, puts aside a copy of *HOLIDAY* and stands, to leave the hospital, full and empty, empty, full, like himself, now, behind.

Such is the power of the power.



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# The Moth Message

by Laurence Manning

LAURENCE MANNING was first seen in a collaboration with the late Fletcher Pratt, *The City of the Living Dead*, in the May 1930 issue of SCIENCE WONDER STORIES. Later he appeared on his own, writing exclusively for the Gernsback publications WONDER STORIES and WONDER STORIES QUARTERLY. He soon became one of the outstanding favorites of these magazines, and the literary quality of his tales was always notably above the general level of writing in those times — looking forward to the higher-level approach to science fiction that John W. Campbell inaugurated in the late 30's, some years after Manning had ceased to appear. *The Moth Message* is the fourth of the five-tale series relating to the "Stranger Club", whose motto is *Truth is Stranger Than Fiction*. Earlier tales in the series, *The Call of the Mech-Men* and *Caverns of Horror*, appeared in the November 1965 and November 1964 issues of MOH respectively. Elsewhere in this issue you will see an announcement relating to the publication of the other two stories in the series.

AT THE FIRST touch of the warm weather this spring, I had the most overpowering attack of laziness that I have ever experienced. It comes every summer, regularly, but the cold winter brought it on rather earlier I suppose. At such times I usually grit my teeth and work along no mat-

ter how I feel but somehow I couldn't stick it out at the office. I tried reading, but found it too soothing and monotonous; I don't go in much for girls and the alternative seemed to be a mild course in drinking. So it happened that I found myself in the taproom of the Stranger Club at eleven

o'clock on a Thursday morning ordering the tall and icy.

The place was deserted when I arrived, but I had not finished my first drink when LaBrot came in — a member I barely knew. He was from French Africa — tall, dark, and supple of body — he spoke English with a bare trace of accent. I downed the contents of my glass at once and proposed that we have a drink together. "You name it," said I, "and we'll both drink it." This seemed witty to me at the time — why, I have no idea now. We drank that and discussed another when Seeman slipped through the doors, silent and poker-faced. LaBrot had the brilliant idea of making each new arrival name his drink and the first comers drink it. Seeman, of course, was all for whiskey straight — to one who did not know the man, the suggestion would have seemed as shocking as though put forward by a newly frocked curate — and when Stendahl came in, he proposed Karlsburg beer. By the time the red face and snowy mustache of Colonel Marsh showed in the doorway of the taproom, we were in condition to greet him with shouts and laughter. "What's it to be, Colonel? The drinks are on you and you must name them!" Our idea had, you see, grown a bit.

The Colonel ordered mint

juleps and marched us up to them in squads and insisted that our grasping, raising, and tilting of the glasses lacked true military precision, which he proceeded to drill into us — using up three drinks apiece upon his recruits in so doing.

It was now time for lunch, and sobered by much eating, we spread ourselves about the great lounge, in silence, to do our digestions full justice — for they serve good food at the Stranger Club. Some of the party left, but four of us remained — LaBrot, Seeman, Marsh, and myself. After half an hour had elapsed in quiet, our bodies were relaxed, our minds opened, and our tongues somewhat loosened so that what befell did so naturally and without exciting wonder at the time.

LaBROT BEGAN it all, lying back in an overstuffed armchair and blowing luxuriant clouds of cigar smoke vaguely at the ceiling. "Butterflies," he remarked, apropos of nothing at all, "are my particular hobby."

Colonel Marsh grunted, Seeman's yellowed face remained immobile, and I shifted vexedly in my seat. What I wanted was a good rattling yarn, not butterflies.

"Butterflies," continued LaBrot, "are verree interesting and little understood. The patterns

on their wings are like nothing else in nature — for there is no regularity about it at all. The two wings are identical in reverse, of course, but that is all."

He lapsed into silence and I hoped that he had fallen asleep, but presently he continued.

"In North America you have a number of wing-patterns not found elsewhere. The Jasmine Sphinx Moth, what you call *Chlaenogramma*, has an elaborate form of shading and outlines; the *Cerura borealis*, one of the puss moths, has peculiar dark markings on its wings. It is not remarkable for an insect to be strangely marked — tigers are and so are guinea-pigs. But did you know that every *Cerura borealis* in the country — millions probably — have exactly the same markings?"

"Eh," I ejaculated, vaguely interested. "Is that true?"

"Perfectly true, my friend," said LaBrot. "It is peculiar, is it not?"

"Yet, rather. You'd think there would be minor changes."

"Oh, there are. About as much difference between one specimen and another as there would be between two copies of a word in two different handwritings. You could see the difference, but the word would still be recognizable."

"Queer way to put it, La-

Brot," said Seeman quietly, his keen glance fixed on his face. "Meanin' just what?"

"Ah-h! You are verree quick to see things, but no? Meaning, perhaps they *could* be! For another strange thing, century after century, generation after generation of moths, the children of one species are like copies of their parents and the markings are like the same word in a still different handwriting!"

SEEMAN SAT bolt upright in his chair and carefully lit a cigarette, which he puffed slowly and all the while his eyes never left LaBrot's face. LaBrot continued to address the ceiling, as though he did not see any of us.

"Now if that word were written on paper, it would be gone in a few hundred years, is it not so? If it were engraved on stone — even in the dry air of Egypt — it would last only a few thousand years before the weather wore the markings down.

"Suppose the word were written in the marks of a butterfly's wing — how long would it last? Every year a fresh copy is fathered by the old — the weather destroys the old copy and the young one remains intact. Moreover, the word spreads and is multiplied until millions of that particular kind of moth carry the word over

many miles of land. Time may permit the word to cover whole continents — but time cannot erase the word so written! You are now interested, my Seeman, but yes!”

“Can’t see what you’re drivin’ at yet — go on!”

“Hereditry is strange — nothing seems so permanent as a useless heritage,” continued LaBrot. “We still possess a vermi-form appendix. Now I must ask you how many years have elapsed since this was useful to us? Originally a second stomach, it is said. We have been men maybe a million years, is it not so, and since we have been men we have not used this heritage! How long, then, might marks remain in a butterfly wing?”

“Why not tell us the whole story — if it is one?” I put in abruptly and LaBrot was silent at once. Then Colonel Marsh signaled an attendant with his forefinger and presently were sipping liqueurs (*Creme de Cacao*, to be precise) and the strong sweet stuff set LaBrot’s tongue free.

“I am attached to the French consulate here, as you may know. Last summer I spent my vacation in southwestern Colorado collecting butterflies and enjoying the wild life. I caught several specimens of a new species — no, not even that — a variation of an Ameriacn species. It has peculiar mark-

ings that look like writing and — well, here it is . . .” He fished into a pocket and produced a flat leather case which he handed around to us. It contained a mounted moth — light yellow with orange rims and on the light portions were strange wriggling marks in jet black.

“It’s a Sphinx moth — *Chlaenogramma LaBrotti*, I call it, though it is still unknown to science. You see, the extraordinary part of the whole thing is that a month ago I had these marks here *translated*!”

“Good God!” said Colonel Marsh and stared pop-eyed at the thing as though it would bite him.

“Go on!” said Seeman.

“The writing of the ancient Phoenicians is extraordinarily like that moth wing. I didn’t know it, of course. What I did — being struck with their peculiarity — was to copy free-hand on a piece of paper the marks in the order they appear. I took my paper to an archaeologist I happen to know slightly. A week later he sent it back with this note: ‘It is a crude representation of some Phoenician inscription, apparently, though one of the words is meaningless and several of the characters are so distorted that their meaning almost had to be guessed at. Where did you get it?’

“That’s what he wrote me —

that and the translation. Of course, it may all be gibberish or pure coincidence but — read it!"

TYPEWRITTEN ON the sheet of paper that he handed me were the following words:

". . . (The children of) the Sun (are) . . . place (of) hills (at or near) the source of the Water (or river) . . ." There followed a translation into Phoenician characters and the three of us compared these carefully with the marks on the insect. The similarity was extraordinary — indeed, it was plain that they were so nearly identical as to make coincidence the only explanation. And as for coincidence — what is it someone said? If a thousand monkeys played with typewriter keys for a thousand years, what chance would they have of happening to strike out all the words in the Encyclopedia Britannica? Eager-eyed, we turned to LaBrot for more details.

"Nothing more to say. Only I shall take my vacation next week — we get a month at the consulate — and I shall be going back to Colorado. I thought, if you don't think this all silly nonsense, perhaps one or more of you might care to . . ."

"H-r-rumph!" The Colonel exploded. "Silly nonsense! Your vacation starts tomorrow, sir,

and all *three* of us are going with you — make no mistake! This can't wait!"

LaBROT SMILED. "There's one thing more, maybe of interest. The country where I caught this moth is rough and barren. One section of it is raised up on cliffs a thousand to two thousand feet high above the surrounding land. Up above must be twenty square miles where human feet have never touched!"

"Nobody bothered to climb up?"

"No, no! You don't understand! Many have tried, but it is not climbable. I walked all around at the foot of these cliffs, walked and rode, and I traveled twenty miles and came back where I started and at no place was there the slightest crack or slope — all was vertical and impassable."

"Haven't they any aeroplanes in Colorado?"

"Ah, yes! They have flown over it. I found a pilot at Denver, an amateur, who had flown above and looked down upon it. He told me that steep hills and rock pinnacles are everywhere and there is no flat place to land — not even one hundred yards. Many trees grow in the little valleys and gullies — trees are everywhere except where the rough rocks show."

Colonel Marsh was poring

over the translation. "You think that this plateau might be what is called 'place of hills'? How about this business of the source of a river?"

I laughed shortly. "What rivers would you like? The Colorado, the Rio Grande, and the Missouri, herself, all start in Colorado!"

"That is right," agreed LaBrot. Then, turning to Seeman, "You say nothing. Why were you so interested when I began telling?"

"Sort of legend in Africa — one of the tribes, at least. All about butterflies being messengers, y'know. Supposed to carry messages between the spirits or something like that — I never really got the hang of it."

"Ah, yes! I had never heard that."

"But LaBrot," I put in. "What would ancient Phoenicians have been doing in western America? The continent hadn't been discovered by three or four thousand years!"

"Ah!" he replied, raising his eyebrows and pursing his lips. "That excites, but yes? What indeed?"

"Then I take it," demanded the worthy Colonel, "that you propose to get up on this plateau and see what's there! How shall we get up?"

"Once during the war I saw a blimp making a landing on a mountain side to let off a

man. Certainly nothing else could do it — not an aeroplane, at least. Maybe we could rent a blimp?"

"Hr-rmph! Rent one! We'll buy one. . . . get me the phone book. . . . no, boy! Boy, there! Go to the telephone and get me the Badyear Rubber Company!"

LaBrot raised his eyebrows at me. I smiled. "Colonel Marsh is worth a great deal of money — don't worry about it. If he wants to buy a blimp, he'll buy it. I'm tickled to death to have an excuse for a vacation — how about you, Seeman?"

"What artillery, d'you suppose we'd better take along?" he asked in reply.

IT WAS TEN DAYS later, as a matter of fact, before we arrived at Newark Airport and saw our newly delivered blimp moored by a rope to a tenton truck. It was Colonel Marsh's idea that we should fly all the way out, for the airship had a capacity of 1,500 pounds and could take the four of us and her pilot with ease. Her cruising range was about 500 miles normally, but we packed light kit and could take on a few extra gallons. There was a light breeze blowing and the ship rode a hundred feet up in the air as steadily as a bird soaring. At our signal, she came down to within ten feet of the ground and

a rope ladder was thrown over which we seized and pulled upon so that the enclosed gondola was only a high step from the level field. We piled in, helping each other, and two of the Badyear Company mechanics helped us load the duffel. Then we found our seats in the cramped cabin — two long bunks — and I glanced out the port to see the ground far below. Silently and effortlessly we were rising.

When we had reached a few hundred feet of altitude, the pilot — a long, lean, taciturn fellow — started the engine and I could feel the ship swing to the pull of the propeller and head around due west. Then the motor settled down to a steady deafening roar and we were on our way. The trip was uneventful; we ate and slept on board. We stopped three times for gas and I was amazed at the ease with which each landing was effected. A light-hooked anchor on a rope was lowered until a flying field attendant caught it and hooked it over something solid — once it was a concrete pylon, and once a dozen men held it — then we drew in on the rope until we were almost on the ground. At Denver we stayed several hours and loaded up with grub and filled the ship's tank with fresh drinking water. We were ready.

LaBrot sat up beside the

pilot now and pointed out our course carefully on the map. His name was Stevens — a likeable enough chap — and he thought that we were scientists and slightly mad. He was to land us and return to Denver — stay at Denver a week and call for us again. "It's okay with me, boss," said he. "I've got a brother who lives in Denver and I ain't seen him in two years."

OUR EYES WERE now all glued to the portholes and we were fascinated by the wonderful landscape stretched out below us — I never knew that mere rock could be so ornamental — every color of the rainbow, pretty near. And hills and precipices and forests of spruce trees were all thrown in to keep it from getting monotonous. But presently the character of the countryside began to change. More rocks and less greenery and wilder confusion of cliff and gorge appeared. No signs of human habitation were to be seen. For another hour we flew low, skirting mountainsides and roaring down gorges to the screaming disgust of an occasional eagle. Then when we did sight our goal, we were close upon it — a vertically stratified range of unbroken cliffs that looked like the sawed-off stump of a vast hollowed tree. The hollow was



seven miles across and filled with a forest of ancient spruce that rose at us like cyclopean spears, and amongst the green showed brown and gray and reddish rocks and pinnacles.

"This is the place," I heard LaBrot say to Stevens. "Could you land us on the edge of the cliff somewhere, d'you suppose?"

Stevens looked doubtful and juggled the controls so that we lost altitude and the motors were idling. The great up-thrust area of timbered wilderness seemed to come closer by the second until we floated only a hundred feet above it. "Stand by to lower the anchor," called Stevens and then, "Let her go . . . about two hundred feet of line . . . with a little luck, now . . ."

And then, miraculously, the ship lurched gently and we were swinging closer and closer to a flat area of perhaps twenty feet width and a hundred feet length at the very top of the cliff. LaBrot was in the open door of the gondola and presently he jumped six feet down to the solid rock. I threw out our equipment, piece by piece, and tricky work it was, for the blimp swung and rose in the light breeze. Then I jumped, myself, at a favorable moment and Colonel Marsh fell on top of me before I could recover, but fortunately neither of us was hurt.

It was five minutes before Stevens could get the blimp down again after it had been released from our double weight and then it was just for an instant within eight or ten feet of the rock when Seeman leaped. We caught him or he would have fallen flat. When we looked up again, the blimp was two hundred yards above us, Stevens having abandoned his anchor and line.

He called out, "See you next week!" and waved an arm. We waved back. Then the motor started and he headed up and north and was soon out of sight among the hills. We were on our own. Here on this rocky and broken plateau were almost fifty square miles upon which the foot of modern man had never been set.

"LaBrot! Look there!" called Seeman suddenly and pointed to a small yellowish butterfly that fluttered near. LaBrot peered intently until the thing had gone. Then he turned to us. "I think that was one of our chaps," he said, and turned away to stare down over the country we had come to explore — his cheeks flushed slightly and his eyes sparkling.

WE HAD GAINED some notion as to the lay of this high land from the airship. Although such a jumble of stone and wooded cliff could be termed nothing but capricious,

such plan as there was might be described as follows: first, the encircling cliff-top, varying from one to two thousand feet in height; second, from where we landed, a gorge leading away southwest and forking into two main gorges, which might be termed East and West Gorge; third, a series of smaller branching valleys and gorges on both sides of the main depressions; fourth, a central raised portion, which might have been originally a conical mountain now deeply scarred and cleft by weather and geological action. Our first undertaking was to descend the sharp slope which led to the uneven floor of the main gorge two hundred feet below us. We left our reserve supplies up on the rocky table where we had landed and loaded ourselves with a day's rations and ammunition. Each of us carried a knife and a revolver and a coil of one hundred feet of strong, light rope.

"We have water, but hadn't we better look for more?" asked Seeman, the veteran camper among us. And we agreed to make this our first search and set off slithering and scrambling down the slope — aided by the half-dozen dwarfed spruces that grew upon it. At the bottom we trudged along between steep cliffs for perhaps a mile over a none-too-smooth surface. At the end

of a mile, Colonel Marsh stopped and drew in his breath sharply, eyeing the ground closely.

"Does it occur to you youngsters," he said, "that this canyon bottom is getting to look more and more like a . . . *path?*"

We hadn't noticed, but it was true — here and there were unmistakable evidences of smoothing. "Couldn't be a water course?" suggested La-Brot.

"It doesn't always run at the lowest level," pointed out Seeman. I felt a chill run up my back all of a sudden and glanced up nervously at the steep slopes that hemmed us in.

WE PROCEEDED down the canyon until we came to the great fork of the main gorges and here a careful study of the rocky soil revealed the fact that someone or something had used the path before us frequently. "It could be animals — goats or bears, perhaps," I suggested. "Let's make camp right here before it gets too dark. There's some firewood even if we have to use water from our flasks."

The others agreed and we rolled our blankets close to the canyon wall in a slight depression and built a roaring fire to keep away the beasts that had done the path-beat-

ing. Coffee and beans were hot as the strip of sky far overhead became dark and filled with stars. After that we talked and speculated and I remember telling LaBrot:

"So far as I am concerned, this trip is just plain vacation — I'm inclined to think that your butterflies were too liberally treated in the matter of a translation. And even if not, I hardly expect that this particular bit of Colorado is the source of their emanation. Now, considered as a vacation, I think we are having a bully time!"

LaBrot was earnestly indignant — sure we would find something unusual.

"Always investigate the unusual!" Colonel Marsh grunted. "No man ever explored this plateau before, did he? There you are! That was enough for me to go on, back in New York, and it's enough now." Seeman refused to enter the discussion and we finally fell asleep under the stars.

HAVE YOU EVER had that sort of nightmare where you lie on your back and can't move legs or arms while a beast or a villain (or whatever) slowly approaches? That's the way I woke up — and I thought I was still dreaming until the ropes cut into my wrists at their striving and I saw in the half-dawn the curious misshap-

en figures bending over my companions and Colonel Marsh's furious shouting broke the silence of the gorge with wild echoes! The sweat poured suddenly cold over my forehead — what creatures had captured us? Why? I had no time for such imaginings, for a blanket-draped figure approached me and brought me shrieking to my feet with an expert twist on my wrist lashings. Then with a sharp jab in the thigh he set me walking, and when I turned my head to look back at my companions, I felt a spear point draw blood on my left cheek and kept my face straight ahead after that. About five minutes later I heard behind me the sounds of other walking (we were passing through gravel) and called out: "Are you all right back there?" The painful wound in my buttocks that resulted was only partly compensated for by the threefold response from the rear that assured me my companions were at least in no worse case than I. After that we walked in silence for an hour.

It was broad daylight by now and our path broadened to all of two feet width and we came upon a canyon deeply overhung by cliffs from above. Up this gloomy tunnel we marched, to round a corner suddenly upon a *cul-de-sac* perhaps two hundred yards a-

cross in the form of a circle broken for twenty feet only by the entering canyon. Cliffs partly overhung this open area so that a double handful of sky showed five hundred feet above us. Our eyes, however, did not glance upward — there were more amazing sights to draw them. The entire face of the cliff was the facade of a vast circular building evidently extending into the living rock. It was regularly carved into great square pillars with a massive overhanging pediment and between the pillars, the rock was dressed and pierced with openings for windows and with flat-arched doorways. This sight, in the midst of a wilderness, might be considered bewildering enough. Yet, in addition, there was that which took our breath away; the facade fairly blazed with gold! It was plastered in sheets upon every pillar, and the main doorway, facing us, seemed to have been built entirely of the yellow metal!

**THERE WE WERE** in a group, surrounded by our squat and ugly captors (they looked almost humpbacked) and gasping at it all. And then out from the cool gloom of the golden gateway stalked a tall, clean-limbed old man in purple robes that fell to his golden shoes. He looked at us in silence a moment and then

clapped his hands. A dark-faced dwarf — like our guards — ran to him dog-like from the shadows, was given a quiet order, and vanished through the gateway. We waited in silence for five minutes until another figure came into the bright sunlight from out of the gold-framed darkness. Then we stared in real earnest!

I don't quite know how to write down what she looked like — the first time we saw Val-Bel. Her hair was a cloud of red gold and her skin a creamy olive. Her figure was magnificent and stirring to the pulses with its bow-string tautness, and set off with as beautiful a face as I ever expect to see this side of Paradise. She looked straight at us and her eyes became fixed upon (I turned slightly to make sure) no other than LaBrot. He supported the look, like a dazed man, for a full minute. I noticed that the girl's face was tinged with the least touch of pinkness when she finally started and turned to the old man. Two words were said. They saved our lives, as I know now, but we did not at the time. They were followed by a sharp command and our guards herded us promptly at the word off to the left and into a minor doorway and along a dark hallway cut in the stone of the mountains. We tramped on echoing stone for a minute or

two and then turned into a large room and — our guards cut our bonds and remained in the doorway!

There we were, you see — prisoners. Colonel Marsh grunted and pulled his mustache through his fingers, eyeing the guards speculatively. The other three of us explored our quarters and found that a dark archway gave entrance to still another room in which were four palette beds upon the floor — straw mattresses, for I felt them. Off that again was a small room in which was sunk a pool of water about six feet square and four feet deep, and with a constant flow entering at one end and going out at the other, over a groove cut in the rocky floor of the room. Rude enough comfort, perhaps, but entirely adequate, except for light, which was furnished by enormously long shafts a foot square and extending, evidently, up to the very top of the cliff in which the caves were excavated.

WE WENT BACK into our "living-room" and found Colonel Marsh alone, but the butt of a spear showing beyond the archway indicated that a guard was outside.

"And now what?" asked Seeman. We did not reply. After a while, a tray of food was brought in and placed on the floor, the swart squat servitor

instantly retiring. There was cold meat and a sort of scone baked in ashes, with sheep's milk (so the Colonel pronounced it) in a leather bottle. We ate in silence in the half gloom of the stone walls, and when we had finished the tray was removed.

"They are feeding us, anyway," I said to the others.

"I suppose you chaps realize that they have left us our revolvers!"

"What! Why, that's right! Took our knives and left the guns on-us!"

"Then we can walk out of here whenever we want to!"

"Wait a minute," cut in La-Brot. "What did we come here for? To find out what was here and why, yes? We're being fed — let's wait a few days and see what it's all about."

It was an absurd situation. Yet if we broke for freedom, killing the guards, we might never learn who these people were. We agreed to pretend to be prisoners — but "we musn't let 'em tie us up again, you know," stipulated Seeman.

AND JUST AS we had that matter settled, in walked Val-Bell followed by two awkward fellows carrying wax tapers. Her hair seemed like a third light in the room and she walked proudly looking straight toward us. She beckoned to the guards to set down the

candles and in doing so one guard touched her dress — she flared up in a great rage as though she were of different clay from that humble, cringing being — as though a mere touch from him was intolerable smirch. His fellow led him stumbling out of our presence, and her face lost that frightening haughty look as she turned to us once more.

With her hand, she pointed to her breast, said "Val-Bel" and then pointed to LaBrot. He only looked at her as though he had lost wits. She repeated the action and then he came to himself with a start and gave his own name. In turn she learned all our names. We found that wax-tapers were "*ge-luce*" and that shoes were "*pod-la*. For an hour she gave us a thorough lesson in her language and signifying that she would return the next day, she left us. A little later we were brought our evening meal, and upon consuming this we retired, feeling unusually sleepy. I know that I was asleep before I had time to fully reflect upon the events of the day — when I awoke I still felt tired and gazed around in a half stupor before I realized that I was dressed in a flowing cotton robe instead of my own clothes! In surprise I rose upon an elbow and peered around in the half gloom at my sleeping companions. Our

clothes had been taken away and with them — *our revolvers!*

I roused the others one by one and told them the news.

"We've been drugged!" grunted Colonel Marsh. "Now we're in a fine pickle!"

"What do you suppose they are going to do to us?" asked Seeman.

I feared the worst, but LaBrot seemed unalarmed. "Val-Bel won't let anything happen to us," he said confidently. She came shortly afterwards, and two guards with her to give us our breakfast. She looked interestedly at our new clothes and seemed much pleased with the effect, particularly with LaBrot's appearance. Our language lesson commenced at once and lasted for the entire day.

FOR THE NEXT two weeks we remained in that semidungeon, unable to determine upon a definite attempt to escape and speculating upon whether our pilot would continue to call week after week for us at the edge of the plateau. We could converse with some freedom in the new language by now, yet had learned absolutely nothing of the inhabitants of the plateau, nor the purpose of our captivity. Val-Bel simply refused to answer any questions and confined her attentions entirely to teaching us words. Every

morning she arrived shortly after our breakfast and remained with us for six or seven hours of intensive study. And for the rest of the day and the long evenings we had "ennui," as LaBrot called it — sheer boredom.

One day Val-Bel did let in a little light upon our mystery — she spoke hesitantly, as though afraid to reveal more than a very little. I had framed a sentence in her language: "How is it, Val-Bel, that your people ever got up on this plateau if they cannot now get down again?"

"But when they first came here it was not a plateau," she replied, her eyes wide at the thought. "That was in very ancient days and all around stretched level land, save for these small ravines and bluffs — or so the books say. The ships sailed right up to the old wharf that was not half a mile distant — up the great river they sailed, and brought new colonists and took away the gold."

"The gold! How did the gold get here?"

She looked more surprised than ever. "From the mines, of course! This colony was the most productive gold mine in all the empire — why else would a colony be set here so many thousands of miles from

half closed and gazed vacantly over our heads while she appeared to listen. But I could hear no sound — I wondered then and have wondered since whether these people could converse at a distance without words. Certainly she seemed to have received a warning of some sort. "I must not say any more — let us continue with our lesson!"

"But one thing — just one! Surely it cannot be forbidden," pleaded LaBrot.

She looked at him and her face softened. "What is it?"

"How does it happen that the plateau is now half a mile above the plain outside and where has the great river you mention now gone?"

Her brow furrowed and she glanced around uneasily. "Well . . . I will answer that, for what harm? The books speak of a great earthquake, of the rocks shaking and tumbling. Many of our colonists were killed. Out over the plain as far as they could see, the ground rose and fell rhythmically and sections rose hour after hour until they became distant mountains. The water in the river all ran down into great cracks that opened to receive it in the earth's crust. The sun set on that terrible day and after a night of terror the sun rose on a new countryside — even as we see it now

She started, and her eyes



... There! Now we must stop talking and study!"

THUS THE DAYS passed. Each morning we looked forward to Val-Bel's coming. Finally one morning we heard the expected sounds and looked up to see not Val-Bel, but the tall white-bearded figure we had seen on the first day. He gazed at us in silence a moment. Then: "You will follow me!" he commanded and turned on his gold-sandaled heel. Six guards came in and we followed him without waiting to be prodded into it! The sunlight was startlingly bright, even in that deep canyon, after our long stay in the prison, and the air was crisp and clean in our nostrils. We found ourselves led, however, directly toward the enormous golden portal of the main cavern and quickly plunged into its gloomy interior. When our eyes could make out any details at all, we gasped — all four of us. Never in my life have I imagined so much gold! The room was square and measured fully a hundred feet across, while overhead the stone walls curved over to make a pointed arch enormously high and breathlessly beautiful. At the very center, a shaft of light was reflected from the sky above by polished triangles of gold that covered the opening.

We crossed the stone floor

and commenced climbing a great staircase cut in the rock. Minute after minute passed and our legs were growing fatigued when we came upon a broad passage from which many arched doors opened. Into the first of these we were led and the old man seated himself beside a large open window through which the sunlight streamed. He beckoned us to seat ourselves on stone benches resting against the wall of the room and the guards retired outside. Then in the language we had spent weeks learning, the old man spoke, and this voice was grave and chilling.

"You will wonder why I have brought you here. That you will learn soon. First I ask you why you came to my plateau. Answer!"

We hesitated as to who should be our spokesman, but LaBrot took it upon himself to answer. "We read the message on the wing of the moth," said he.

The old man inclined his head. "We found that moth upon your clothing."

"We came to learn if you still needed help."

"That is possible — yet must I be sure that you are qualified to help. Were you sent to us from Atlantis?"

"From Atlantis" (The name was pronounced as in English.)

We looked around at one another. I blurted out: "But Atlantis does not exist! It has not existed for thousands of years — not since human history began, if ever!"

The old man's eyes were hard as they strove to pierce my brain. "What you say is absurd," he answered coldly. "What purpose can you have in seeking to deceive me?"

"We do not know Atlantis," put in LaBrot. "It has sunk under the ocean."

OUR HOST WAS visibly growing angry. "It is some attempt to persuade me to yield my guardianship over the gold!" he cried. Then he smiled and said, "We will forget this nonsense. I will tell you why you have been brought here. Listen well.

"You must know that this plateau was left cut off from the surrounding plain many thousands of years ago. Upon it were a dozen men and women of the ruling class of Atlantis, my ancestors, and a few hundred of the working classes. They waited for an expedition to come with my slaves to bear away the gold and so far we still wait in vain. Something must have happened — not the absurd thing you suggest, but more likely," he looked hard at us, "*much* more likely, an enemy has cut Atlantis off from her mines and colonies.

No matter, for here we will wait until the gold we guard is sent for.

"Many years passed. They could not get down to the plains below the cliffs, though many slaves were forced to make the attempt. Always they fell and my ancestors saw them die below. So they bred over long, slow centuries of selection a moth that bore their message in its wings and these moths were released by thousands. Yet more centuries passed.

"Whether from some natural weakness in the human strains on this plateau or whether from the mere number of inbred generations, I know not, but our workers degenerated with the centuries and our rulers brought forth fewer and fewer children. This is now so serious that of the line of rulers there remain only myself and my daughter. The workers — they are the deformed dwarfs you have seen! I have permitted none of them to breed — for many years the newly born have been monsters or imbeciles, which I destroyed. The race must die out. That is a small matter, for they are only workers. But my daughter is of the race of the sun. When four young men arrive upon our plateau, you can easily imagine to what purpose I shall devote you!

"From you four she must

select a mate; this she shall do today."

"But — the other three?"

He raised white bushy eyebrows. "They are of no use to me," he said coldly.

"And what will you do with us, then?"

"You will be destroyed, for you are not of the working class to be of use, and no man who has seen the gold can be permitted to leave these mines — even if he could."

"Hr-r-rumph!" exploded the Colonel, red of face, "*we came here, did we not?*"

"I know how you came — for the great flying boat that brought you was here again a few days since looking for you. We had no such things in my day — we scorned material comfort and progress in Atlantis, considering that only the mind was worthy of development. I am not curious as to how your flying boat is constructed, nor am I impressed with its creation. Such mechanical tricks do not bespeak a great race — rather a lazy one."

HIS FACE WAS scornful and Seeman looked quizzically at me.

"Your own race would have left here thousands of years ago if you had had an airship, sir!" Colonel Marsh sputtered. "It's all very well to call names, but how about your own case!"

"This is absurd! What use

would it be to take gold to Atlantis if the gold were not needed? If it had been needed, they would have come here! Enough of this nonsense. Val-Bel shall choose here and now which of you she will mate with — then we can dispose of the rest of you!"

He struck a gong at his side and a guard entered. "Your mistress!" commanded the old man and we waited in silence for her to come. It was an awkward situation — which of the four of us would she choose? Only one could live! We looked at each other in veiled side glances — our eyes betraying our private thoughts. Suddenly Seeman laughed, his yellowed face wrinkled and his eyes bitter. In English he spoke to us. "You know, we're actin' like a lot of players on a stage! Let's seize the old man and make him order the guards to stand aside while we walk out of here. We can't get more than killed!"

LaBrot's brow furrowed in thought and his eyes became apologetic. "Please! Not yet! You see — well — I love Val-Bel! I think she loves me, but . . . how can I find out unless we wait? Besides, I have an idea that she will give us all more time. It's this: after she chooses . . ."

But then it was too late, for through the door came Val-Bel and LaBrot became dumb like

a man stricken so. She looked at her father questioningly and then without words nodded and turned to LaBrot, placing her hand gently upon his shoulder.

"I have chosen," she said simply.

And at her words the old man struck the gong again and before we three had time to think what it meant, the room was full of guards and it was too late. I saw LaBrot struggling with two of them — Val-Bel anxiously urging them to be gentle with him; I saw Seeman, his face impassive, marching down the hall without resistance, and Colonel Marsh wordily submitting to overpowering force. Then I permitted myself to be shoved along in the wake of Seeman. Down the stairs we went in the darkness and along a sweating tunnel of stone and through a doorway into a prison similar to our old rooms. Seeman was awaiting me, and after a minute the Colonel was thrust in, panting and blowing, and with three small wounds bleeding in his thigh where the urging spear points had thrust.

"Looks like we're done for this time," he announced gloomily, staring at the guards beyond the doorway.

"Oh, I dunno," answered Seeman. "LaBrot said he had an idea, y'know! We're not dead yet!"

IT WAS ALMOST pitch dark; just a faint glow of light came from the tunnel, but after an hour or two, our eyes could make out three straw pallets against the wall — our only furniture — and we lay down on these and slept. After a while, some food and drink was brought in under guard and set upon the floor of our chamber. Here in the darkness we ate and slept and ate again, for we knew not how many days or hours — fearfully waiting for what each next minute might bring forth. "In God's name, *why* didn't we break free the first day when we still had our revolvers?" I heard Colonel Marsh groan, and my own thoughts echoed the sentiment.

There followed two days of waiting — never knowing from minute to minute how much longer we had to live. We became quite philosophical toward the last, resigned to our fate and all that sort of thing, and spent much time discussing what we had heard from the old man as to the origin and purpose of this strange unworldly colony of a long-vanished race. Also we wondered how LaBrot was making out in his enforced marriage and for how many weeks our aviator would return for us in the blimp before he gave up hope and (perhaps) organized a searching party — and

whether they would find us still alive!

During that dark vigil we pieced together the story of this strange gold-mine colony. Seeman started it by remarking that we had learned very little for the probable cost to ourselves.

"Nonsense!" said Colonel Marsh. "We have the whole story. First exploring parties from the continent of Atlantis set out in ships to find the Gulf of Mexico — find the Mississippi River, probably. They sail up it to its source which in those days, evidently, ran close by this plateau. They land here and discover gold and leave a colony to mine it and determine its richness. Years later the ship returns with more colonists and picks up a cargo of gold to go back to civilization. Again and again the ships come for gold until the Day of Wrath when Atlantis sinks beneath the sea. Even here in Colorado — thousands of miles away — that cataclysm was felt. Mountains were thrust up and the river vanished. The gold mine and the colony around it were elevated a few thousand feet and cut off from the surrounding country. They attempt to descend the cliff and fail. They spend their time breeding messages on moth wings and — no doubt — other equally fanciful attempts at communica-

tion with the outer world during the long centuries. But discipline goes on — gold is still mined and piled up waiting the next ship that is to sail from a sunken civilization up a dry river! It must take a lot to convince these Atlanteans of a fact!"

"It *does* make a story the way you sum it up, Colonel," agreed Seemann.

"And now that we have solved the mystery, how much better off are we?" I put in a trifle bitterly. "Apparently we are to be killed and our knowledge is to die with us, anyway!"

WE WERE ALL three silent for a time. Then Seeman broke it. "Curious that we three should actually *see* an Atlantean. Do you remember the story that night at the Stranger Club?\*" Why do you suppose we have been picked out for these revelations? And why, having seen and heard, are we selected to die?"

"But LaBrot is free — surely he will think of something

"Doubt it!" snapped the Colonel. "You can't depend on a man when he falls in love."

"I don't agree," drawled Seeman. "I think he'll find a way. But if he doesn't, I shant worry. The only way to act is to

\*Voice of Atlantis, FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION, Winter 1966/67. See page 127.

be calm and prepared. If we have to die — well — that's that! What good would it do to worry?"

When it came, therefore, we were not three determined men but three fatalists and before we could make up our minds to die resisting, the room was full of guards as before and we were led out through the passages into the sunlight where we blinked strongly and stared stupidly around us. Then we saw the pile of brush and the three stakes and — but there were three guards to each of us and that panic-stricken moment of struggle was quickly over. With our hands lashed behind us, we were marched each to his stake and securely tied there.

"No sign of LaBrot!" said Colonel Marsh significantly.

"Wait awhile — we're not dead yet," replied Seeman.

The brush was being piled around our knees now and my eyes frantically searched the doorways and windows in the shadowed cliff face. Surely LaBrot would at least attempt a rescue! But, except for the nine guards, there was no human being in sight. And then from the golden arch of the temple came the old man and in his hands was a lighted torch that smoked and sputtered. On he came, his pace slow and sedate and his face

grave and serene. Now he was but ten steps away and in sick dread I closed my eyes and wondered desperately how painful this death might prove.

SO I ONLY HEARD the shots — I did not see LaBrot leaning out of the window fifty feet up the cliff until four of the squat guards were writhing in their death agonies upon the ground in front of me. He must have had another revolver ready, for six more shots rang out and only one guard was left and he quickly vanished into the darkness of a nearby archway. Then the old man seemed to get a new grip on himself and strode unflinching toward us, torch in hand. I strained my head to catch a glimpse of LaBrot's window — it was empty! Now the old man was lighting the faggots at my feet and they caught slowly and crackled and the smoke swirled up and choked me so that I coughed. It never occurred to me to speak. Somehow I knew that no prayers or pleadings could move my executioner to a moment's pity. I heard Colonel Marsh groan inarticulately.

Then suddenly LaBrot was there kicking away the blazing sticks and holding off his father-in-law with one hand as he did so. In a moment he had cut the bonds that held my wrists, doing it so hastily that

he almost severed the thumb from my left hand at the same time. Spouting blood, I fumbled with my leg fastenings and raced around to free my companions. Free at last, we stood there, the four of us, facing the old white-bearded Atlantean. He gazed at us imperceptibly, only his eyes betraying his excitement and anger.

"Kill me!" he demanded quietly. "You have won! The gold is unguarded and I have failed. I cannot continue to live!"

None of us answered him, but just stood staring. Then Val-Bel's voice came from the rear. "Husband — what have you done?"

LaBrot turned and went to her and I watched them talking in whispers, she seeming to be convinced of something against her will. After a while her head drooped in acquiescence and hand in hand the two walked up to the old man, who was trembling now with fatigue.

"He says, father, that you are wrong. Atlantis no longer exists. Let the gold stay here — for it needs no guards since none can climb the surrounding cliffs — and do you come with us in the flying boat out over the world and see for yourself. He says that if you decide to return here, you shall be free to do so and the gold shall be guarded for you — but if you find that he is right,

then you shall say what is best to be done and whatever you say he will agree to. To this he pledges his life and honor."

The old man was silent for a while. "And what of my dead guards?"

"What loss? A degenerate race — doomed to die in this generation!"

"It is absurd! He lies when he says that the great empire of Atlantis is lost and forgotten among men!"

"Then his life is forfeit to you — he swears so!"

"I swear it!" said LaBrot in a low voice.

"Well — well — what else can I do? I am his prisoner; why does he not kill me?"

And I could see then that the argument was won, but the sun seemed to be fading and there was something the matter with my eyes, for the cliff was tilting over us at a fearful angle and my head buzzed. Everything went black and I remembered no more.

When I was again conscious, it was to the drone of the airship. I was lying on a bunk and Seeman knelt beside me. "There," he said. "Do you feel better?"

"What has happened?"

"You lost too much blood — that cut on your hand, you know. Fainted, that's all. And I'm afraid your thumb is gone. Funny you didn't think to bandage it sooner!"



OF THAT AMAZING voyage with Val-Bel and her old father I cannot write — it would make a story all by itself. The ship was heavy, for besides the extra passengers we carried two hundred pounds of gold — \$70,000 at the new price. Every new town we passed over was the signal for exclamations of delight from Val-Bel and for puzzled and suspicious frowns from the old man. At New York Seeman and I left the ship and returned to our occupations, but the other four were planning a series of flights to convince the old Atlantean that the world had changed.

It was almost a month when I heard again from LaBrot. The letter was postmarked from the Canary Islands. Here it is, for it makes as good a conclusion as anything I can think of:

"We have made three cruises over the Atlantic Ocean from here and Val-Bel's father is resigned to the truth at last. The question is, in that case, what to do with the gold back on the plateau? I put it up to him and he seems not to care in the least. He wants none of it, for Val-Bel and I have assured him that he must spend the rest of his days with us. I suggested that some of it be given to you and Seeman, for Colonel Marsh insists that he has

more than enough money for his needs, and to this he agreed listlessly. Now so much is all very well — wait for the rest of it.

"I asked him then how much gold there was and he pulled from his robes a tile tablet and consulted it a moment. Thirty-three 'Cog-drach' was what he made it. And a Cog-drach? As nearly as I could understand him, about the weight of *one thousand men!* Do you understand, old man? Billions of dollars' worth of gold! Enough to end this depression as suddenly and completely as when half a century ago the gold strikes in California and Australia startled the world and caused such a long period of rising prosperity as the nations had never before imagined!

"So you see that this adventure of ours is not over. I shall need help from all three of you. There's all that gold to be got together and transported to the assay office and when the money is in hand, we must get it distributed. Where? I don't know. I might use a million myself, but that would be my limit. Well, think it over. We'll be back in New York in about a month.

"Val-Bel sends her love and hopes that your hand is better.

"Your friend,

"LaBrot."

# The Friendly Demon

by Daniel DeFoe

"Probably never since Rameses II's 150 children," writes Will Durant about DeFoe in *The Age of Louis XIV*, "has history seen such a prodigy of progeny. The only thing incredible in DeFoe is that he wrote all he wrote." His name is linked most closely with *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (titles were long in the 18th century), which was an immediate success, and went to four editions in four months when it was first published in 1719. 1722 saw the appearance of the other two works for which he is still remembered by most of those to whom his name means anything at all: *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of Moll Flanders*, and *A Journal of the Plague Year*, "... so minutely realistic and statistical that historians look upon it as tantamount to history." DeFoe wrote at high speed, but apparently maintained a high level of matter and style. Durant goes on to say, "In all his 210 volumes (if we may speak from hearsay) there is hardly one dull page; and where DeFoe is dull he is deliberately so, to add to the verisimilitude of his tale." Perhaps some knowing reader of MOH can tell us where the present story first appeared.

A GENTLEMAN in Ireland, near to the Earl of Orrery's house, sending his butler one afternoon to a neighboring village to buy cards, as he passed a field, espied a company in the middle thereof, sitting round a

table, with several dishes of good cheer before them. And moving towards them, they all rose and saluted him, desiring him to sit down and take part with them. But one of them whispered these words in his

ear, "Do nothing this company invites you to." Whereupon, he refusing to accept of their kindness, the table and all the dainties it was furnished with immediately vanished, but the company fell to dancing and playing upon divers musical instruments.

The butler was a second time solicited to partake of their diversions, but would not be prevailed upon to engage himself with them. Upon which they left off their merrymaking and fell to work, still pressing the butler to make one among them, but to no purpose. So that, upon his third refusal, they all vanished and left the butler alone, who in a great consternation returned home without the cards, fell into a fit as he entered the house, but soon recovering his senses, related to his master all that had passed.

The following night, one of the ghostly company came to his bedside and told him that if he offered to stir out the next day, he would be carried away. Upon his advice, he kept within till towards the evening, and, having occasion to make water, ventured to set one foot over the threshold of the door in order to ease himself, which he had no sooner done but a rope was cast about his middle. in the sight of several standers-by, and the poor man was hurried from the porch with unaccount-

able swiftness, followed by many, many persons.

But they were not nimble enough to overtake him, till a horseman, well mounted, happening to meet him upon the road, and seeing many followers in pursuit of a man hurried along in a rope without anybody to force him, caught hold of the cord and stopped him in his career; but received, for his pains, such a strap upon his back with one end of the rope as almost felled him from his horse. However, being a good Christian, he was too strong for the devil, and recovered the butler out of the spirits' clutches, and brought him back to his friends.

The Lord Orrery, hearing of the strange passages, for his further satisfaction of the truth thereof. sent for the butler, with leave of his master, to come and continue some days and nights at his house, which, in obedience to his lordship, the servant did accordingly. Who after his first night's bedding there, reported to the earl in the morning that his specter had again been with him and assured him that on that very day he should be spirited away, in spite of all the measures that could possibly be taken to prevent it. Upon which he was conducted into a large room, with a considerable number of holy persons to defend him from the assaults of Satan, among whom

was the famous stroker of bewitched persons, Mr. Greatrix, who lived in the neighborhood, and knew, as may be presumed, how to deal with the devil as well as anybody. Besides, several eminent quality were present in the house; among the rest, two bishops, all waiting the wonderful event of this unaccountable prodigy.

Till part of the afternoon was spent, the time slid away in nothing but peace and quietness, but at length the enchanted patient was perceived to rise from the floor without any visible assistance, whereupon Mr. Greatrix and another lusty man clapped their arms over his shoulders and endeavored to weigh him down with their utmost strength, but to no purpose. For the devil proved too powerful and, after a hard struggle on both sides, made them quit their hold; and snatching the butler from them, carried him over their heads and tossed him in the air, to and fro like a dog in a blanket, several of the company running under the poor wretch to save him from the ground. By which means, when the spirits' frolic was over, they could not find that in all this hurry scurry the frightened butler had received the least damage, but was left in status quo upon the same premises, to prove the devil a liar.

The goblins, for this bout,

having given over their pastime and left their May-game to take a little repose, that he might in some measure be refreshed against their next sally, my lord ordered the same night two of his servants to lie with him, for fear some devil or other should come and catch him napping. Notwithstanding which, the butler told his lordship the next morning that the spirit had again been with him in the likeness of a quack doctor, and held in his right hand a wooden dish full of grey liquor, like a mess of porridge, at the sight of which he endeavored to awake his bedfellows.

But the specter told him his attempts were fruitless, for that his companions were enchanted into a deep sleep, advising him not to be frightened, for he came as friend and was the same spirit that cautioned him in the field against complying with the company he there met, when he was going for the cards; adding that if he had not refused to come into their measures he had been forever miserable; also wondered he had escaped the day before, because he knew there was so powerful a combination against him; that for the future there would be no more attempts of the like nature; further telling the poor trembling butler that he knew he was sadly troubled with two sorts of fits; and as a friend he had brought him a medicine that

would cure him of both, beseeching him to take it.

Then the spiritual doctor asked his patient if he knew him. The butler answered no. "I am," says he, "the wandering ghost of your old acquaintance John Hobby, who has been dead and buried these seven years; and ever since, for the wickedness of my life, have been lifted into the company of those evil spirits you beheld in the fields, am hurried up and down in this restless condition, and doomed to continue in the same wretched state till the day of judgment" — adding that "had you served your Creator in the days of your youth, and offered up your prayers that morning before you were sent for the cards, you had not been treated by the spirits that tormented you with so much rigor and severity."

After the butler had reported these marvelous passages to my

lord and his family, the two bishops that were present, among other quality, were thereupon consulted, whether or no it was proper for the butler to follow the spirit's advice in taking the plantain juice for the cure of his fits, and whether he had done well or ill in refusing the liquid dose which the specter would have given him. The question at first seemed to be a kind of moot point, but after some struggle in the debate, their resolution was that the butler had acted through the whole affair like a good Christian, for that it was highly sinful to follow the devil's advice in anything, and that no man should do evil that good might come of it.

So that, in short, the poor butler after his fatigue had no amends for his trouble, but was denied, by the bishops, the seeming benefit that the spirit intended him.



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# Dark Hollow

by Emil Petaja

EMIL PETAJA is a long-standing lover of weird fiction, who had half a dozen appearances in WEIRD TALES between 1944 and 1952, and we had the pleasure of buying a number of his off-beat mystery and detective tales during the 50's. The present story might have been published in WT, too, if the magazine had lasted longer.

HE WAS TOLD that Edith Spinney was having lunch in her private office, as she did every day, so Adam parked himself tentatively on the edge of a nearby chair and fretted. At last the buzzer rattled and the blonde behind the desk looked up at him with a nod and a wink.

"You can go in now, Mr. Monfret."

Adam stood up, fussing with his his ancient hat. He was a little, avocado shaped biped who was uneasy in the presence of humans (he preferred books,

mainly those about elves and gnomes and such) so that now his pale gray eyes blinked unhappily under his balding fringe of dust-colored hair. His suit, like his hat, smelled of mothballs.

"Go ahead in," the secretary prompted.

Adam nodded and gulped. Then, to his despair he *was* in. Edith Spinney continued to brush crumbs of lunch into a paper napkin and then deposited this into the wastebasket by her impressive desk. That she was remarkable was apparent in

her brisk manner, in her poise, in her dress — which tended toward tailored-mannish, but expensive. She had a forceful nose, a strong chin, and behind those heavy-rim glasses were dark eyes accustomed to command. That streak of gray in her straight bunned hair was natural.

When she pulled her glance up from her work, Adam's heart contracted and stopped. She looked capable of tossing him out of that thirtieth-story window if she didn't like the color of his tie. He sighed for his bookish apartment in Seattle.

He stood up. She was very tall.

Adam tried to think how to excuse himself and retreat, when her stern thin lips turned upwards into a cool smile. She came over and shook his hand, firmly.

"I know your work, Mr. Monfred. I think we can do business."

"W-What . . .?" He tried to smile.

"Sit down, Adam. Sit down. You don't mind if I call you Adam?"

Adam sat and nodded vigorously. Then, realizing this was the wrong thing, he cried, "No, no! Certainly not, Miss Spinney."

"Fine." Miss Spinney picked up some papers and ran her glance over them. "Your references are excellent. You have

compiled as well as written quite a list of books of light folklore and so on. Children's fantasy, too. While the job I have in mind is not quite in this line, I'm confident you will do admirably."

He blinked like an elderly owl.

"This is what we have for you, Adam. As you know our list includes a few off-trail books every season. I enjoy the unusual, myself, but it has to be authentic. This project is very authentic. Briefly, last month one of our scouts discovered a remarkable manuscript in a Salem attic, hidden in the false bottom of an old trunk."

"Witch-country," he murmured.

MISS SPINNEY smiled. "Hardly, these days. But yes. In fact, this manuscript purports to be the actual chronicle of a Salem witch, or warlock if you prefer, and everything indicates that it is indeed that. I haven't had time to plow through the crabbed handwriting myself, but our researcher tells me that it is a record of this person's activities.

"This is where you come in, Adam. I want you to translate it into readable modern English without losing all the seventeenth century flavor. Our first edition will be quite limited, expensive. Maynard Doro will illustrate. You'll have consider-



able license in the treatment and augment the witch's notes with appropriate tales based on the content. The whimsical touch, I think. That's what we want and that is what you do so well."

Adam sat back in his chair with a quivering sigh. How wonderful. Broomstick legends. He would love it. And Maynard Doro to illustrate the book. He blinked back tears. "A privilege, Miss Spinney. A rare privilege."

"Good. Now. Are you settled comfortably in New York?"

"No. Can't I go back home to Seattle?"

"Too far. I like to keep in touch."

Edith Spinney lit a cigarette and scowled out at the smoky design of metal and glass framed by her windows.

"You know," she decided abruptly, "I think you'd do better in a bucolic atmosphere; obviously you don't think much of New York. I've got it!"

"Yes, Miss Spinney?"

"New England, of course. Salem. Charming in the fall. Right back where the manuscript came from. I'll make the arrangements with a renting agency and you may have your choice. My secretary will make out an advance check for you before you leave."

She walked him to the door where she handed him a bulky well-protected manuscript. "Guard this with your life, Adam. These original manus-

scripts are worth their weight in gold, you know. Remember — the light touch."

Adam clutched the parcel tight to his heart. "Don't worry, Miss Spinney. I'll die before . . ."

"I trust you implicitly," she smiled. "Goodbye."

She watched him patter back to his chair to wait for his check. Something elfin and lovable about the little old man; he wanted caring for. She moved briskly back to her work with a deep sense of accomplishment.

ADAM PICKED a lonely but pleasant gray cottage near the forest some distance from Salem itself, north and east. It had a Hansel-Gretel look, he thought. To reach it he took a bumpy taxi ride down a dirt road that forked off the main highway that ran along the Ipswich River, around a hillock of bare boulders, ending up in a hidden clearing surrounded by dark trees.

The solitude was exactly right.

Summer was verging into autumn; the leaves began to change color. A hazy, almost supernatural, stillness hung over this section of woods. The rutted side road discouraged even the most avid farm antique collectors, and there were no farmhouses on this unprepossessing offshoot anyway.

Mrs. Grumett lived on the outskirts of the nearest village and she came by twice a week

to do for him. She cleaned up and kept the cottage supplied with food, and kerosene for the lamps. Adam was a born bachelor; he enjoyed preparing his own rather outlandish meals, but might have died of malnutrition had it not been for Mrs. Grummett.

The task which Edith Spinney had given him was delightful. It didn't matter that the manuscript was hard to decipher and rambled on, with references to strange books in foreign languages which he knew were unavailable from his lifetime of prowling library stacks. The author boasted a lot of supernatural powers and of his connection with Dark Ones from Other Places. Adam smiled; he skimmed over the more sinister passages. The light touch, Miss Spinney had said.

One warm September afternoon Adam found the distraction of the bees' drowsy humming, and the breeze wafting out of the piney woods more than he could bear. He was trying to make out an almost-obliterated passage, the scrawled letters trembled across the brittle page. Voices in the forest were calling.

Dutifully he kept at it, then re-read what he had transcribed:

*The Word of Origin. It must be known to all who would delve into vasty things that wisdom lies in the knowing of the all concerning those whom he*

*may encounter on these dark roads. Knowledge and spoken word bring the power of control or to banish they from Beyond. Sufficient that he know and recite to each daemon his truthful name and relate to him the history of his evil beginnings.*

Adam thought a shadow, like a great wing, fell across his desk, but when he looked out there wasn't a cloud in the sky. It was purest blue and there were the wind-driven voices of the forest beckoning him.

He sighed and put away his work. All work and no play. Perhaps a walk in the forest would clear the cobwebs out of his mind.

HIS PATH was aimless. It was pleasant in the woods' hush, listening to the sighing of the breeze, the crackling of dry leaves underfoot. A strangely portentous melancholy lingered on the air. The dying leaves, perhaps. He couldn't shrug it off, yet he had never been so contented before in his life. His project was to his liking and it was going well. His long gushing letter to Miss Spinney about how much he liked the cottage and how excited he was about the manuscript elicited a crisp but friendly note expressive of complete confidence in Adam's abilities. What a remarkable woman! A little frightening, but she had to maintain that air of domination competing with a

savage world where the men played her lip service but secretly resented her.

Adam kicked idly at a toadstool. It squished unpleasantly under his nudge, so that he grimaced. He loathed toadstools. Poisonous unnatural things! He always had. In his children's books he had always avoided them, insisting that they must never be associated with the Little People. Only with the Uglies.

They were big here, in the deepest part of the forest. There were a lot of them, small ones, enormous puffs, poking their leperous pink-tops up out of the black mold. He blinked around him, noticing how they seemed to form grotesque chains and patterns. He gasped when he saw one fully three feet high, its crusty head reddish brown like dried blood.

He wanted to turn back but some morbid fascination drew him on toward a deep circular hollow. It was here that the toadstools formed a perfect ring around an open spot that was curiously empty of vegetation of any kind. A dead place at the bottom of the hollow.

As he stepped into it Adam gave a start. There was an odd sucking sensation just at his feet, as if something wanted to pull him down under the ground. He blinked up. There was light playing about his head, but a peculiar kind of light. He saw

no opening in the trees, not a crack, and when he squinted his eyes in bewilderment it seemed that the light was a blue-green phosphorescence out of millions and millions of tiny spores dancing in a spiral over the dead spot. Adam got dizzy from watching them whirling and whirling in a kind of silent crescendo. A sickish aroma came from them or from the mold under his feet. The giddy tarentella of the spores, the ring of toadstools, the cruel silence, all filled him with a feverish terror. But he couldn't move. He just stood there, swaying a little.

Odd thoughts invaded his mind, unclean Pannish thoughts. He found himself breathing in with a fierce joy, breathing in the dancing fiery spores. He laughed. A surge of desire and power swept over him.

Some lingering vestige of the old timid Adam Monfred filtered through, shrieking for him to leave this unholy place. He sobbed deep in his throat. Closing his eyes made it possible to try; he leaped, fell in an awkward sprawl outside the ring with his face crushing against an enormous, moist, cold toadstool. He scrambled to his feet and fled.

FOR A WEEK Adam shunned the forest as he shunned death. He kept to the cottage, immersing himself mind and soul in his work. But for some rea-

son nothing seemed to go right. The simplest declarative sentence he wrote turned out warped and redolent with sardonic *doble entendre*. Also there came the odd notion he was being constantly followed, shadowed. That there was somebody lurking unseen just beyond the corner of his eye. But when he dropped his pen in desperation and searched through the cottage and even outside the windows for peekers-in, he found nothing. Mrs. Grummett found him more odd and abstracted in his behavior than ever and finally she gave notice that she wasn't coming back any more. It was a long way for her to come, anyway, and she was sick and tired of it. Her arthritis was beginning to bother her again. She was sorry.

Adam blinked at her vaguely, uninterested and rather glad to be rid of her. A crafty smile crossed his thin lips as he watched her scurry away down the path.

He was troubled by strange dreams. Always there was a man standing beside his bed, a tall ascetic man with hollow cheeks and eyes that burned like green flames. The man didn't utter a word, but there was a command in that imperious look. Finally Adam knew. During the full moon Adam dreamed he got up from his bed and stumbled out and through the forest to the hollow. The toadstools all glow-

ed and flecks of shining mold made a path for him, lighting his way. As he moved into the dead place where the spores were dancing, he ripped off his clothes. He wanted the spinning bits of light to touch every part of his body. The odor that had been merely unpleasant during the day was nauseating now, but after while it was as if he took pleasure in it.

He awoke in his own bed. It was morning. But there was a repugnant stench in the air, that came from himself. His legs ached, his whole body ached, and when he looked down at his feet, he saw that they were scratched and criss-crossed, black with forest mold.

Now it became a ritual, the trip to the dark hollow, the bath in the dancing spores. He began to bring back toadstools and transplant them around the cottage where it was shady. Some he planted inside, tossing out the geranium pots Mrs. Grummett had brought. They were so beautiful, with their graceful white stalks and jaunty red puff-heads. By night they filled the cottage with an enchanting spectral brilliance. But every morning Adam would cover them up tenderly from the penetration of the sun's garish rays.

One day, accidentally, he ran across the wizard's manuscript. It was lying in a corner where he had tossed it. He opened it

idly on the section about the necromancer's life.

"My name is Thomas Oliver Sark. I was born at 283 Aylsberry Street in Salem, Massachusetts in the year 1659. I saw my mother hanged as a witch when I was three. I recall how I gurgled and smiled to see . . .

Adam chuckled, then frowned as he tossed the sheaf of brittle papers into the open hearth fire, watching the tongues of flame gnaw on it and shrivel it into black ashes. That the manuscript had ever been written at all, in a vain-glorious bragging spirit, was a mistake. Better it was gone now. The knowledge in it could never be used against him, now.

EDITH SPINNEY was not too surprised not hearing from Adam after that first effusion and after that a few brief notes. Writers, especially the Adam Monfred variety, were apt to become so absorbed in their work that nothing but the need for another advance in royalties could draw them out of their cocoons. Still, time was wasting and Miss Spinney was anxious to get the book into the hands of the printers.

Over her lunch tray one afternoon her glance was taken by an article in the paper she invariably allowed herself, an article that pulled her eyebrows into a frowning line.

### **WITCH CULT ACTIVE IN SALEM AGAIN AFTER THREE HUNDRED YEARS?**

it asked provocatively. Its tone was generally humorous but there were portions that were most serious. It seemed that several children had disappeared from the villages in the Ipswich River area. An eight-year-old girl vanished while on an evening errand the night of September 29th, full moon. There were others. Oldsters recalled tales they had been told as children, handed down from their grandparents, and the feature writer for the paper took the time to interview some of them.

There was one old man by name Claus Corbey, who blurted outright that an evil menace lurked over the county. People had glimpsed a strangely frightening Creature in the dark alleys or hovering behind trees near the towns. The interviewer hinted that this Creature might have come out of a bottle at the taverns. Old Claus said, vehemently, "Nay, man. The Thing uses the blood and certain organs of the little ones to keep himself alive. And for sacrifices to them he serves."

Miss Spinney tossed the paper aside impatiently, but then, when she tried to get back to her busy afternoon duties she found it impossible to concentrate. Nervous, fretful, not her-

self. An hour's bungling and staring out at the skyscrapers and she gave up. It might have been the article, or not hearing from Adam, or intuition. But she decided, she must do something about it, and *now*.

She got up briskly. "I'm going to drive up to Salem to see Adam," she told her secretary.

"But your appointments!"

"Put them off."

"Maynard Doro's been calling and calling. He wants your okay on the preliminary sketches."

"Phone him that I'll stop by on my way."

There was an hour delay with the temperamental artist, then she found herself tooling her convertible into the Holland Tunnel.

A SMOKY BLUE haze hung over the cropped fields along the Hudson; the sky was brassy blue above; Edith Spinney curled her lip at herself for the impulse that had sent her speeding along the turnpike to Massachusetts, when she had all that work to do at the office. The Salem book was not going to be a big seller, obviously; other things were a hundred times more times important.

Cool evening darkened the sky to gun-metal by the time she reached the crossroads where the river wound north, a chilling wind shivered the willows at the slag-gray river's edge. The stream gurgled old

secrets to itself on its turgid, winding way; nighthawks veered about, cutting the silence with their eerie plaints.

Miss Spinney paused a moment to consider all of this and herself with frowning disapproval. There was an aura here, a sense of portent, that she didn't like at all. It was most disturbing; Miss Spinney was not a fanciful woman and the whole business bordered on the absurd.

She gave the wheel a savage twist, backed, poked ahead again to the very edge of the brush that hemmed in both sides of the little rutted road Adam had described in that first effusion, and finally set the protesting wheels of the dark convertible bumping down that dirt fork. Yes. There was the outcropping of rock on the hillock, and an abrupt twist of the wheel took her bouncing into the clearing of the darling little cottage.

Scowling, she braked the car as close as possible to the flagged weedy path to the front door, and sat squinting through her glasses at Adam Monfred's pride and joy. Lord! This couldn't be! Surely this wasn't the fairy-tale cot in the forest which Adam had found so enchanting. Where were the roses, the trim hedges?

This low building was a sickly greenish gray in the fading light, overgrown with toadstools.

Ugh! Was she mistaken or did the toadstools themselves put out most of that sickly prosperous glow? Miss Spinney had never seen, nor imagined such toadstools as these. True, she was a city-bred woman, but was this natural? Big bloated things with heads that looked smeary with dry blood. Not only grotesque, unreal, but inimical.

She gathered herself together and stepped out of the car. Appearances meant nothing. Adam had been busy — no time for gardening chores. Some peculiarity of the soil had promoted these uninviting growths. She would go in and reassure herself that the book was going ahead as well as could be expected, then back to New York. Tonight. Tomorrow was a busy day; she would not admit to herself how all this repelled her. It was all Miss Spinney could do to move one foot ahead of the other toward the cottage door, avoiding the unwholesome-looking fungi.

There was no answer to her bold knock.

"Adam?" she called. Her voice was more shrill than usual. "Adam, are you in there?"

No answer.

The door pushed open under her gloved hand and she stepped in. An intense, unpleasant odor struck her, made her cough. The room was musty but more than just that.

"Needs a good airing."

Miss Spinney stepped across the room briskly and flung open the double windows above the cluttered sink. She looked down at the mess of dishes, distending her nostrils at the feathery covering of slimy mold that lay over the plates and cups and pots in a phosphorescent patina.

She must stop staring down at them; she found a kerosene lamp and lit it. Her hand shook a little.

Lord! That mold! It was all over the walls, the furniture — everything. The wavering light of the lamp as she held it up, showed the cottage to be basically one large room that served as both kitchen and parlor, with a small bedroom off the rear wall. And everywhere was mold, with pots and coffee cans and wooden boxes of toadstools set about. Adam Monfred must have a fungi psychosis of some kind.

Noticing that the glass-base lamp had mold on it, as well, Miss Spinney set it down hastily. She looked down at the phosphorescent smudge on her dark gloves with strong distaste.

"Adam?"

A glance in the dishevelled bedroom and the little lean-to storage shed told her this impulsive trip of hers was useless. From the look of it, nobody had lived in the cottage for weeks. She was on the point of striding out to make inquiry in



Salem as to Adam's present whereabouts when she heard a slow furtive step outside, and the door creaked slowly open.

EDITH SPINNEY was not a timid woman, not at all, but just at this point a mordant fear, like a spider, skittered along the nape of her neck. Her spine tingled from it. But there was nothing she could do now except stand her ground. She planted her feet firmly against the wood loor and waited.

A hunched-up ball of a figure appeared in the open doorway.

"That you, Adam?"

He closed the door behind him.

"Miss Spinney! What a pleasant surprise!"

When he moved a few steps closer to the lamp, she squinted to study his face. He seemed different. His dumpy waddling figure moved with a new swagger, and there was a sly glint in those eyes.

"I came to find out how you are getting along, and maybe take part of your work back for editing."

"Oh?"

"I haven't heard from you in weeks."

The thin oval mouth gaped in an odd smile.

"Nice of you to be concerned, dear lady. I take it that you were worried. But you needn't have been. I've never been more — ebullient in my life!"

"Fine. Fine, Adam."

That glint. And the incongruous new self-aplomb. Miss Spinney drew in her breath sharply. Well, he *did* look healthy. Plump as a butterball. A reddish glow had replaced the scholarly pallor of his face as she remembered it, and the autumn sun seemed to have burnt his bald spot as well. She was oddly reminded of something but what escaped her just for the moment.

"How is the book coming, by the way?"

"Book?" He shrugged. "Oh, yes. Very well." He weaved toward the cupboard, chuckling. "Won't you have some refreshment. A cup of tea, perhaps?"

"No, thank you, Adam."

Miss Spinney gave her head a little shake to put her mind back in its normal brisk track. "I'll just be running along. I popped in on my way down from Boston. When you have something for me, send it down by registered mail, will you, Adam?"

She tucked in the lie about Boston because she felt a little foolish. Surely these wild thoughts that crept into her mind were only her imagination. Adam was perfectly all right. A terrible housekeeper, but so most bachelors were. After all, she had only met him once. What did she really know about him? He'd wanted the job and had thought the cringing Uriah Heep manner was the best way to get it.

She took his soft hand in hers briefly and went quickly out and back to her car.

Turning the ignition key she noticed how the smudge on her glove, where she had touched Adam's bare hand, shone with that swamp-fire glow. She frowned and shrugged, glancing out. The sky was nearly dark now; over the ring of dark trees a pale lop-sided moon was rising. All the toadstools stood out bluish-green fired, like her glove. Looking at them, she shuddered without knowing she did.

ADAM STOOD there in the doorway, watching. "How do you like my garden, Miss Spinney?"

He moved down the pathway, his outstretched hands on both sides caressing the tops of the monstrous ungi.

Her earlier fear gripped her again. She pushed down the desire to panic. There was something unclean, inhuman, about the whole scene, as if a diabolical force had taken possession of this little house. She must get away!

She twisted the key hard. Nothing happened. She twisted it again, again. The engine did not turn. Nothing.

She thought Adam chuckled.

"You mustn't leave so soon, Miss Spinney." His voice was a wheedling, mocking laugh. "You told me that you enjoyed the unusual, didn't you? But it had

to be authentic, you said. Stay here a while, Miss Spinney. I'll show you something very unusual. And authentic. Very authentic!"

She tried the key again, tramping the accelerator in a sudden convulsion of panic. Nothing happened.

"I'm afraid the car won't start until I let it," Adam said blandly.

"You tampered with the engine!"

"Nothing so crude, dear lady. I merely made use of one of the words at my disposal. Words are magic things. Wouldn't you say that, Miss Spinney? You probably have said it, one time or another, since you deal in words."

She stared with whitened lips. "You aren't going to let me leave. . . . Ever."

Adam shrugged.

"It all depends, dear lady. Suppose you come on back in the house to await the diversion I promised you. The night air is getting chilly. You're shivering."

Miss Spinney tried with all her might, but something over which she had no control whatsoever compelled her to follow him stiffly back to the lamplit parlor of the cottage. Facing his sardonic little smile, an adrenalin-burst of anger overcame loathing and terror.

"You wouldn't dare touch me!"

"I have no desire to touch you, dear lady. I had rather thought of making use of you, later on. Yes. You could be quite useful."

"Useful?"

Her mind whipped to thoughts of the vanished children. *Blood and certain organs to keep them alive. Sacrifices to them they serve.* Fear caught her by the throat, so that she moved back from him as far away as she could get. Her glance went to the closed door but no matter how much she tried, her muscles refused to act. Across the room. That was as far as he would let her go.

She pushed out a quivering breath. "You — you aren't Adam Monfred! Who are you?"

HIS TITTER froze the marrow inside her bones. Edith Spinney gulped for oxygen while her head reeled. She must not faint! She must *not* faint!

There was something, something she had read. If she could only remember. She must remember! She *must*!

*Be it known to all who would delve into forbidden things. . . . knowledge and the spoken word . . . banish them from . . . his truthful name . . . history . . .*

"The word of origin," she gasped.

The plump face twisted into a raging mask. Was that a flash of fear in his eyes?

"You can't know!"

"I do know! I know words, too. I know the words that will send you back where you came from — *Thomas Oliver Sark*!"

The doughy mask of a face went white and seemed to shrink. Hate leaped out of the creature's eyes, like a thing. "How — how do you know?"

"The book. Your own book!"

"But I burned it!" he screamed. "I burned it in the fire, and my notes, too!"

Edith Spinney knew she must not falter now, or she was lost. She thought of those children. She *must* remember every word! In harsh words that pushed out from deep in her throat she told him. His father's name and his mother's name. His birthplace. His wild searchings after terrible secrets. How, in his studies, he had found the way and used his knowledge to probe even deeper into the chasms of time and space. How he had lost his position in the London school for attempting to steal a rare book. Evil concourses with others as wicked as himself. How, fleeing from the witch-hunters, he performed monstrous rites in the dark hollows in the forest, resigning himself to temporary death until the time was right to come back, using the forest itself . . .

Adam Monfred's body began to change hideously. He fell on the floor, threshing, begging for help from those he had called forth and served.

"How . . ." he strained. "How . . .?"

"How did I find out? I told you I hadn't had time to read the whole manuscript. But there was a copy, I had a copy typed out for Maynard Doro to use in making the illustrations. I told you I like things to be authentic. And I stopped by Doro's to see his first sketches on my way here, and while I was there I skimmed over his copy. Thank God!"

She closed her eyes for a moment to choke down revulsion, then she moved unsteadily back into the storage room where she'd seen a big kerosene can stoppered with a potato. She took the potato out of the spout, and sprinkled the kerosene over the diving room, letting the empty can fall from her nerveless fingers with a clank. Then she went outside with the lighted lamp.

She said a word, hurled the lamp back in, and ran for the car.

Her horn-rimmed glasses mirrored the blaze, as the little cottage went up in a blast of anti-septic fire. Fierce joy filled her as she watched the greedy tongues of fire lick across the toadstools.

Now the engine started up easily.

When Edith reached the highway along the river, her unnatural calm sloughed away; she jammed down the accelerator with all her might. Somehow she must contrive to forget. Somehow, her tilting mind adjured, she must stop remembering how Adam's stretched skin had burst open when she said the Word — burst open to scatter hell-dust spores clear across the floor of that demon-haunted cottage.

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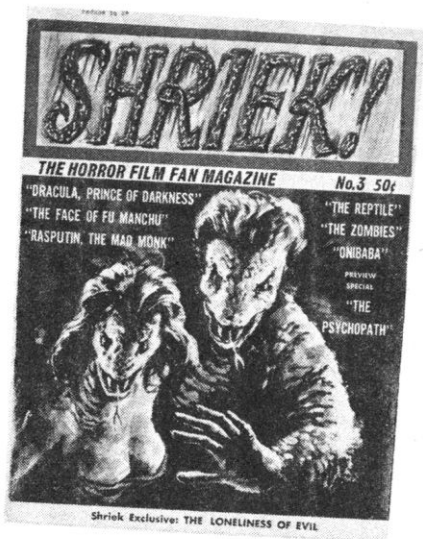
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# An Inhabitant Of Carcosa

by Ambrose Bierce

(author of *The Death of Halpin Frayser*, *A Psychological Shipwreck*, etc.)

This vignette from the collection, *Can Such Things Be?*, seems to have been one of the sources for the references in Chambers' *The King in Yellow*.

For there be divers sorts of death—some wherein the body remaineth; and in some it vanisheth quite away with the spirit. This commonly occurreth only in solitude (such is God's will) and, none seeing the end, we say the man is lost, or gone on a long journey—which indeed he hath; but sometimes it hath happened in sight of

many, as abundant testimony sheweth. In one kind of death the spirit also dieth, and this it hath been known to do while yet the body was in vigor for many years. Sometimes, as is veritably attested, it dieth with the body, but after a season is raised up again in that place where the body did decay.

**PONDERING THESE** words of Hali (whom God rest) and questioning their full meaning, as one who, having an intimation, yet doubts if there be not something behind, other than that which he has discerned, I noted not whither I had strayed until a sudden chill wind striking my face revived in me a sense of my surroundings. I observed with astonishment that everything seemed unfamiliar. On every side of me stretched a bleak and desolate expanse of plain, covered with a tall overgrowth of sere grass which rustled and whistled in the autumn wind with heaven knows what mysterious and disquieting suggestion. Protruded at long intervals above it, stood strangely shaped and somber-colored rocks, which seemed to have an understanding with one another and to exchange looks of uncomfortable significance, as if they had reared their heads to watch the issue of some unforeseen event. A few blasted trees here and there appeared as leaders in this malevolent conspiracy of silent expectation.

The day, I thought, must be far advanced, though the sun was invisible; and although sensible that the air was raw and chill my consciousness of that fact was rather mental than physical — I had no feeling of discomfort. Over all the dismal landscape a canopy of low, lead-

colored clouds hung like a visible curse. In all this there were a menace and a portent — a hint of evil, an intimation of doom. Bird, beast, or insect there was none. The wind sighed in the bare branches of the dead trees and the gray grass bent to whisper its dread secret to the earth; but no other sound nor motion broke the awful repose of that dismal place.

I observed in the herbage a number of weather-worn stones, evidently shaped with tools. They were broken, covered with moss and half sunken in the earth. Some lay prostrate, some leaned at various angles, none was vertical. They were obviously headstones of graves, though the graves themselves no longer existed as either mounds or depressions; the years had leveled all. Scattered here and there, more massive blocks showed where some pompous tomb or ambitious monument had once flung its feeble defiance or oblivion. So old seemed these relics, these vestiges of vanity and memorials of affection and piety, so battered and worn and stained — so neglected, deserted, forgotten the place, that I could not help thinking myself the discoverer of the burial-ground of a prehistoric race of men whose very name was long extinct.

Filled with these reflection, I was for some time, heedless of



the sequence of my own experiences, but soon I thought, "How came I hither?" A moment's reflection seemed to make this all clear and explain at the same time, though in a disquieting way, the singular character with which my fancy had invested all that I saw or heard. I was ill. I remembered now that I had been prostrated by a sudden fever, and that my family had told me that in my periods of delirium I had constantly cried out for liberty and air, and had been held in bed to prevent my escape out-of-doors. Now I had eluded the vigilance of my attendants and had wandered hither to — to where? I could not conjecture. Clearly I was at a considerable distance from the city where I dwelt — the ancient and famous city of Carcosa.

No signs of human life were anywhere visible nor audible; no rising smoke, no watchdog's bark, no lowing of cattle, no shouts of children at play — nothing but that dismal burial-place, with its air of mystery and dread, due to my own disordered brain. Was I not becoming again delirious, there beyond human aid? Was it not indeed all an illusion of my madness? I called aloud the names of my wives and sons, reached out my hands in search of theirs, even as I walked among the crumbling stones and in the withered grass.

A noise behind me caused me to turn about. A wild animal — a lynx — was approaching. The thought came to me: If I break down here in the desert — if the fever return and I fail, this beast will be at my throat. I sprang toward it, shouting. It trotted tranquilly by within a hand's breadth of me and disappeared behind a rock.

A moment later a man's head appeared to rise out of the ground a short distance away. He was ascending the farther slope of a low hill whose crest was hardly to be distinguished from the general level. His whole figure soon came into view against the background of gray cloud. He was half naked, half clad in skins. His hair was unkempt, his beard long and ragged. In one hand he carried a bow and arrow; the other held a blazing torch with a long trail of black smoke. He walked slowly and with caution, as if he feared falling into some open grave concealed by the tall grass. This strange apparition surprised but did not alarm, and taking such a course as to intercept him with the familiar salutation, "God keep you."

He gave no heed, nor did he arrest his pace.

"Good stranger," I continued, "I am ill and lost. Direct me, I beseech you, to Carcosa."

The man broke into a barbarous chant in an unknown tongue, passing on and away.

An owl on the branch of a decayed tree hooted dismally and was answered by another in the distance. Looking upward, I saw through a sudden rift in the clouds Aldebaran and the Hyades! In all this there was a hint of night — the lynx, the man with the torch, the owl. Yet I saw — I saw even the stars in absence of darkness. I saw, but was apparently not seen nor heard. Under what awful spell did I exist.

I seated myself at the root of a great tree, seriously to consider what it were best to do. That I was mad I could no longer doubt, yet recognized a ground of doubt in the conviction. Of fever I had no trace. I had, withal, a sense of exhilaration and vigor altogether unknown to me — a feeling of mental and physical exaltation. My senses seemed all alert; I could feel the air as a ponderous substance; I could hear the silence.

A great root of the giant tree against whose trunk I leaned as I sat held inclosed in its grasp a slab of stone, a part of which protruded into a recess formed by another root. The stone was thus partly protected from the weather, though greatly decomposed. Its edges were worn round, its corners eaten away, its surface deeply furrowed and scaled. Glittering particles of

mica were visible in the earth about it — vestiges of its decomposition. This stone had apparently marked the grave out of which the tree had sprung ages ago. The tree's exacting roots had robbed the grave and made the stone a prisoner.

A sudden wind pushed some dry leaves and twigs from the uppermost face of the stone; I saw the low relief letters of an inscription and bent to read it. God in Heaven! *my* name in full! — the date of *my* birth! — the date of *my* death!

A level shaft of light illuminated the whole side of the tree as I sprang to my feet in terror. The sun was rising in the rosy east. I stood between the tree and his broad red disk — no shadow darkened the trunk!

A chorus of howling wolves saluted the dawn. I saw them sitting on their haunches, singly and in groups, on the summits of irregular mounds and tumuli filling a half of my desert prospect and extending to the horizon. And then I knew that these were the ruins of the ancient and famous city of Carcosa.

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Such are the facts imparted to the medium Bayrolles by the spirit Hoseib Alar Robardin.



# Coming Next Issue

I did, however, chance upon something of unusual interest, in the oldest of the heavy volumes. It was an account of a very ancient feud. The names mentioned were those of Sir Godfrey Ramsey (the date was in the century before the French Revolution) and Sir Richard Ravenal. The account gave mention of several brutal killings and disappearances, the majority of these executed by the House of Ravenal. The cause of the feud was not divulged.

The hatred between the two families, however, had come to an end with the death of Sir Richard Ravenal, who was, to quote the withered page before me, "an artist of unusual genius. In the year previous to his death, having formed a truce with the House of Ramsey, he did present to Sir Godfrey Ramsey one or two paintings of great value, executed by himself, as a token of eternal friendship. These paintings have been carefully preserved."

I sought faithfully for an account of the life of this same Sir Godfrey. Eventually I found it, and read the following:

"Twelve years after the Houses of Ramsey and Ravenal had formed the pact of peace, Sir Godfrey was suddenly stricken with an incomprehensible terror which led to complete madness. He did call his son, Sir James, to him and say the following words: 'A curse has descended upon the House of Ramsey. It is a curse of horror, of torment. It is intended to make gibbering idiots of the men who bear the honored name of Ramsey. For this reason I command you to an oath of silence. The curse has taken possession of me, and I shall die. When you are of age, you, too, will be stricken by the spectre. Swear to me that you will not reveal the nature of the curse, lest your sons and their sons after them live in mortal fear.'

"This oath was written into parchment and preserved. On the second day following its execution, Sir Godfrey was found lying in the upper galleries."

*What was the Doom that lured the men of Ramsey to madness and death in*

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# The Monster-God Of Mamurth

*by Edmond Hamilton*

OUT OF THE desert night he came to us, stumbling into our little circle of firelight and collapsing at once. Mitchell and I sprang to our feet with startled exclamations, for men who travel alone and on foot are a strange sight in the deserts of North Africa.

For the first few minutes that we worked over him, I thought he would die at once, but gradually we brought him back to consciousness. While Mitchell held a cup of water to his cracked lips, I looked him over and saw that he was too far gone to live much longer. His clothes were in rags, and his hands and knees literally flayed, from crawling over the sands, I judged. So when he motioned feebly for more water, I gave

it to him, knowing that in any case his time was short. Soon he could talk, in a dead, croaking voice.

"I'm alone," he told us, in answer to our first question; "no more out there to look for. What are you two — traders? I thought so. No, I'm an archeologist. A digger-up of the past." His voice broke for a moment. "It's not always good to dig up dead secrets. There are some things the past should be allowed to hide."

He caught the look that passed between Mitchell and me.

"No, I'm not mad," he said. "You will hear, I'll tell you the whole thing. But listen to me, you two," and in his earnestness he raised himself to a sitting position, "keep out of Igidi Desert. Remember that I told you

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Some time in 1925, Farnsworth Wright, editor of *WEIRD TALES*, received a manuscript from a young man named Edmond Hamilton, a story entitled *Beyond the Unseen Wall*. He did not feel that it was quite right in its original form, and returned it with what he hoped was a friendly and encouraging letter! A year later, he received the tale again, reworked, and re-titled *The Monster-God of Mamurth*; and this time he accepted it, running it in the August 1926 issue. Meanwhile, proof that his efforts had indeed been encouraging was with him, for readers of *WT* found a three-part serial (*Across Space*) by Edmond Hamilton starting in the next issue, and, what Hamilton has always regarded as one of his favorites, *The Metal Giants*, in the December issue. By the time that *The Comet Doom*, Hamilton's first story to appear in a regular science fiction magazine, was published in the January 1928 issue of *AMAZING STORIES*, the author already had a wide reputation for thrilling and wonderfully imaginative "weird-scientific" stories, such as *The Atomic Conquerors*, *Evolution Island*, *The Moon Menace*, etc.

If you were to ask who first wrote of alien beings and humans co-operating against a common enemy without prejudice against each other, most science fiction fans would name the late Edward Elmer Smith, Ph.D., and cite *Galactal Patrol*, which first ran in 1937/38; some would mention the earlier *Space-hounds of IPC*, which ran in 1931. Both would be wrong; it was Edmond Hamilton who first projected an interstellar federation of worlds, inhabited by all manner of weird and non-human creatures, who co-operated without form-prejudice or bias against common dangers and enemies. The first story of this series was *The Star-Stealers*, which appeared in *WEIRD TALES* February 1929. Although his alien creatures, and his intricately-worked out civilizations and histories for them, showed seemingly endless ingenuity, Hamilton's plots and story-lines tended to fall into such routine that by 1931 the long-standing science fiction readers were beginning to make unkind comparisons, dub him "One Plot" and "World-Saver" Hamilton, and count the exclamation points. (A fault, this last, true — but, really, why couldn't editors edit in those days?) Yet, it was in 1932 that one of his best, and a forerunner of quality science fiction, stories was published, *A Conquest of Two Worlds*. (*WONDER STORIES*, February 1932.)

Now, of course, he is rightfully praised for a number of fine short stories and novels, in collaboration with his wife, Leigh Brackett Hamilton, and the early tales are forgotten. Well, nearly forgotten — there are some, like the present writer, who still find that they still hold their magic, despite the ubiquitous exclamation points and nearly-identical plots.

that. I had a warning, too, but I disregarded it. And I went into hell — into hell! But there, I will tell you from the beginning.

"My name — that doesn't matter now. I left Mogador more than a year ago — 1923 — and came through the foothills of the Atlas ranges, striking out into the desert in hopes of finding some of the Carthaginian ruins North African deserts are known to hold.

"I spent months in the search, traveling among the squalid Arab villages, now near an oasis and now far into the black, untracked desert. And as I went farther into that savage country, I found more and more of the ruins I sought, crumbled remnants of temples and fortresses, relics, almost destroyed, of the age when Carthage meant empire and ruled all of North Africa from her walled city. And then, on the side of a massive block of stone, I found that which turned me toward Igidi.

"It was an inscription in the garbled Phenician of the traders of Carthage, short enough so that I remembered it and can repeat it word for word. It read, literally, as follows:

Merchants, go not into the city of Mamurth, which lies beyond the mountain pass. For I, San-Drabat of Carthage, entering the city with four companions in the month of Eschmoun, to trade, on the third night of our stay came priests and seized my

fellows, I escaping by hiding. My companions they sacrificed to the evil god of the city, who has dwelt there from the beginning of time, and for whom the wise men of Mamurth have built a great temple the like of which is not on earth elsewhere, where the people of Mamurth worship their god. I escaped from the city and set this warning here that others may not turn their steps to Mamurth and to death.

"Perhaps you can imagine the effect that inscription had on me. It was the last trace of a city unknown to the memory of men, a last floating spar of a civilization sunken in the sea of time. That there could have been such a city at all seemed to me quite probable. What do we know of Carthage even, but a few names? No city, no civilization was ever so completely blotted off the earth as Carthage, when Roman Scipio ground its temples and palaces into the very duust, and plowed up the ground with salt, and the eagles of conquering Rome flew across a desert where a metropolis had been.

"It was on the outskirts of one of those wretched little Arab villages that I had found the block and its inscription, and I tried to find someone in the village to accompany me, but none would do so. I could plainly see the mountain pass, a mere crack between towering blue cliffs. In reality, it was miles and miles away, but the deceptive optical qualities of

the desert light made it seem very near. My maps placed that mountain range all right, as a lower branch of the Atlas, and the expanse behind the mountain was marked as 'Igidi Desert', but that was all I got from them. All that I could reckon on as certain was that it was desert that lay on the other side of the pass, and I must carry enough supplies to meet it.

"But the Arabs knew more! Though I offered what must have been fabulous riches to those poor devils, not one would come with me when I let them know what place I was heading for. None had ever been there, they would not even ride far into the desert in that direction; but all had definite ideas of the place beyond the mountains as a nest of devils, a haunt of evil Jinns.

"Knowing how firmly superstition is implanted in their kind, I tried no longer to persuade them, and started alone, with two scrawny camels carrying my water and supplies. So for three days I forged across the desert under a broiling sun, and on the morning of the fourth, I reached the pass.

IT WAS ONLY a narrow crevice to begin with, and great boulders were strewn so thickly on its floor that it was a long, hard job getting through. And the cliffs on each side towered

to such a height that the space between was a place of shadows and whispers and semi-darkness. It was late in the afternoon when I finally came through, and for a moment I stood motionless; for from that side of the pass the desert sloped down into a vast basin, and at the basin's center, perhaps two miles from where I stood, gleamed the white ruins of Mamurth.

"I remember that I was very calm as I covered the two miles between myself and the ruins. I had taken the existence of the city as a fact, so much so that if the ruins had not been there I should have been vastly more surprised than at finding them.

"From the pass I had seen only a tangled mass of white fragments, but as I drew nearer, some of these began to take outline as crumbling blocks, and walls, and columns. The sand had drifted, too, and the ruins were completely buried in some sections, while nearly all were half covered.

"And then it was that I made a curious discovery. I had stopped to examine the material of the ruins, a smooth, veinless stone, much like an artificial marble or a superfine concrete. And while I looked about me, intent on this, I noticed that on almost every shaft and block, on broken cornice and column, was carved the same symbol — if it was a symbol. It was a rough



picture, much like an octopus, with a round, almost shapeless body, and several long tentacles or arms branching out from the body, not supple and boneless, like those of an octopus, but seemingly stiff and jointed, like a spider's legs. In fact, the thing might have been intended to represent a spider, I thought, though some of the details were wrong. I speculated for a moment on the profusion of these creatures carved on the ruins all around me, then gave it up as an enigma that was unsolvable.

"And the riddle of the city about me seemed unsolvable, also. What could I find in this half-buried mass of stone fragments to throw light on the past? I could not even superficially explore the place, for the scantiness of my supplies and water would not permit a long stay. It was with a discouraged heart that I went back to the camels and, leading them to an open spot in the ruins, made my camp for the night. And when night had fallen, and I sat beside my little fire, the vast, brooding silence of this place of death was awful. There were no laughing human voices, or cries of animals, or even cries of birds or insects. There was nothing but the darkness and silence that crowded around me, flowed down upon me, beat sullenly against the glowing spears of light my little fire threw out.

AS I SAT THERE musing, I was startled by a slight sound behind me. I turned to see its cause, and then stiffened. As I have mentioned, the space directly around my camp was clear sand, smoothed level by the winds. Well, as I stared at that flat expanse of sand, a hole several inches across suddenly appeared in its surface, yards from where I stood, but clearly visible in the firelight.

"There was nothing whatever to be seen there, not even a shadow, but there it was, one moment the level surface of the sand, the next moment a hole appearing in it, accompanied by a soft, crunching sound. As I stood gazing at it in wonder, that sound was repeated, and simultaneously another hole appeared in the sand's surface, five or six feet nearer to me than the other.

"When I saw that, ice-tipped arrows of fear seemed to shoot through me, and then, yielding to a mad impulse, I snatched a blazing piece of fuel from the fire and hurled it, a comet of red flame, at the place where the holes had appeared. There was a slight sound of scurrying and shuffling, and I felt that whatever thing had made those marks had retreated, if a living thing had made them at all. What it had been, I could not imagine, for there had been absolutely nothing in sight, one track and then another appear-

ing magically in the clear sand, if indeed they were really tracks at all.

"The mystery of the thing haunted me. Even in sleep I found no rest, for evil dreams seemed to flow into my brain from the dead city around me. All the dusty sins of ages past, in the forgotten place, seemed to be focused on me in the dreams I had. Strange shapes walked through them, unearthly as the spawn of a distant star, half seen and vanishing again.

"It was little enough sleep I got that night, but when the sun finally came, with its first golden rays my fears and oppressions dropped from me like a cloak. No wonder the early peoples were sun-worshippers!

"And with my renewed strength and courage, a new thought struck me. In the inscription I have quoted to you, that long-dead merchant-adventurer had mentioned the great temple of the city and dwelt on its grandeur. Where, then, were its ruins? I wondered. I decided that what time I had would be better spent in investigating the ruins of this temple, which should be prominent, if that ancient Carthaginian had been correct as to its size.

"I ASCENDED a near-by hillock and looked about me in all directions, and though I could not perceive any vast pile of ruins that might have

been the temple's, I did see for the first time, far away, two great figures of stone that stood out black against the rosy flame of the sunrise. It was a discovery that filled me with excitement, and I broke camp at once, starting in the direction of those two shapes.

"They were on the very edge of the farther side of the city, and it was noon before I finally stood before them. And now I saw clearly their nature: two great, sitting figures, carved of black stone, all of fifty feet in height, and almost that far apart, facing both toward the city and toward me. They were of human shape and dressed in a queer scaled armor but the faces I can not describe for they were unhuman. The features were human, well-proportioned, even, but the face, the expression, suggested no kinship whatever with humanity as we know it. Were they carved from life? I wondered. If so, it must have been a strange sort of people who had lived in this city and set up these two statues.

"And now I tore my gaze away from them, and looked around. On each side of those shapes, the remains of what must once have been a mighty wall branched out, a long pile of crumbling ruins. But there had been no wall between the statues, that being evidently the gateway through the barrier. I

wondered why the two guardians of the gate had survived, apparently entirely unharmed, while the wall and the city behind me had fallen into ruins. They were of a different material, I could see; but what was that material?

"And now I noticed for the first time the long avenue that began on the other side of the statues and stretched away into the desert for a half-mile or more. The sides of this avenue were two rows of smaller stone figures that ran in parallel lines away from the two colossi. So I started down that avenue, passing between the two great shapes that stood at its head. And as I went between them, I noticed for the first time, the inscription graven on the inner side of each.

"On the pedestal of each figure, four or five feet from the ground, was a raised tablet of the same material, perhaps a yard square, and covered with strange symbols — characters, no doubt, of a lost language, undecipherable, at least to me. One symbol, though, that was especially prominent in the inscription, was not new to me. It was the carven picture of the spider, or octopus, which I have mentioned that I had found everywhere on the ruins of the city. And here it was scattered thickly among the symbols that made up the in-

scription. The tablet on the other statue was a replica of the first, and I could learn no more from it. So I started down the avenue, turning over in my mind the riddle of that omnipresent symbol, and then forgetting it, as I observed the things about me.

"That long street was like the avenue of sphinxes at Karnak, down which Pharaoh swung in his litter, borne to his temple on the necks of men. But the statues that made up its sides were not sphinx-shaped. They were carved in strange forms, shapes of animals unknown to us, as far removed from anything we can imagine as the beasts of another world. I can not describe them, any more than you could describe a dragon to a man who had been blind all his life. Yet they were of evil, reptilian shapes; they tore at my nerves as I looked at them.

"DOWN BETWEEN the two rows of them I went, until I came to the end of the avenue. Standing there between the last two figures, I could see nothing before me but the yellow sands of the desert, as far as the eye could reach. I was puzzled. What had been the object of all the pains that had been taken, the wall, the two great statues, and this long avenue, if it but led into the desert?

"Gradually I began to see that

there was something queer about the part of the desert that lay directly before me. It was *flat*. For an area, seemingly round in shape, that must have covered several acres, the surface of the desert seemed absolutely level. It was as though the sands within that great circle had been packed down with tremendous force, leaving not even the littlest ridge of dune on its surface. Beyond this flat area, and all around it, the desert was broken up by small hills and valleys, and traversed by whirling sand-clouds, but nothing stirred on the flat surface of the circle.

"Interested at once, I strode forward to the edge of the circle only a few yards away. I had just reached that edge when an invisible hand seemed to strike me a great blow on the face and chest, knocking me backward in the sand.

"It was minutes before I advanced again, but I did advance, for all my curiosity was now aroused. I crawled toward the circle's edge, holding my pistol before me, pushing slowly forward.

"When the automatic in my outstretched hand reached the line of the circle, it struck against the side of a wall, but no wall or anything else was to be seen. Reaching out my hand, I touched the same hard barrier, and in a moment I was on my feet.

"For I knew now that it was solid matter I had run into, not force. When I thrust out my hands, the edge of the circle was as far as they would go, for there they met a smooth wall, totally invisible, yet at the same time quite material. And the phenomenon was one which even I could partly understand. Somehow, in the dead past, the scientists of the city behind me, the 'wise men' mentioned in the inscription, had discovered the secret of making solid matter invisible, and had applied it to the work that I was now examining. Such a thing was far from impossible. Even our own scientists can make matter partly invisible, with the X-ray. Evidently these people had known the whole process, a secret that had been lost in the succeeding ages, like the secret of hard gold, and malleable glass, and others that we find mentioned in ancient writings. Yet I wondered how they had done this, so that, ages after those who had built the thing were wind-driven dust, it remained as invisible as ever.

"I STOOD BACK and threw pebbles into the air, toward the circle. No matter how high I threw them, when they reached the line of the circle's edge they rebounded with a clicking sound; so I knew that the wall must tower to a great height above me. I was on fire to get

inside the wall, and examine the place from the inside, but how to do it? There must be an entrance, but where? And I suddenly remembered the two guardian statues at the head of the great avenue, with their carven tablets, and wondered what connection they had with this place.

"Suddenly the strangeness of the whole thing struck me like a blow. The great, unseen wall before me, the circle of sand, flat and unchanging, and myself standing there and wondering, wondering. A voice from out the dead city behind me seemed to sound in my heart, bidding me to turn and flee, to get away. I remembered the warning of the inscription, '*Go not to Mamurth.*' And as I thought of the inscription, I had no doubt that this was the great temple described by San-Drabat. Surely he was right: the like of it was not on earth elsewhere.

"But I would not go, I could not go, until I had examined the wall from the inside. Calmly reasoning the matter, I decided that the logical place for the gateway through the wall would be at the end of the avenue, so that those who came down the street could pass directly through the wall. And my reasoning was good, for it was at that spot that I found the entrance: an opening in the barrier, several yards wide, and running higher than I could

reach, how high I had no means of telling.

"I FELT MY way through the gate, and stepped at once upon a floor of hard material, not as smooth as the wall's surface, but equally invisible. Inside the entrance lay a corridor of equal width, leading into the center of the circle, and I felt my way forward.

"I must have made a strange picture, had there been any there to observe it. For while I knew that all around me were the towering, invisible walls, and I knew not what else, yet all my eyes could see was the great flat circle of sand beneath me, carpeted with the afternoon sunshine. Only, I seemed to be walking a foot above the ground, in thin air. That was the thickness of the floor beneath me, and it was the weight of this great floor, I knew, that held the circle of sand under it forever flat and unchanging.

"I walked slowly down the passageway, with hands outstretched before me, and had gone but a short distance when I brought up against another smooth wall that lay directly across the corridor, seemingly making it a blind alley. But I was not discouraged now, for I knew that there must be a door somewhere, and began to feel around me in search of it.

"I FOUND the door. In grop-

ing about the sides of the corridor my hands encountered a smoothly rounded knob set in the wall, and as I laid my hand on this, the door opened. There was a sighing, as of a little wind, and when I again felt my way forward, the wall that had lain across the passageway was gone, and I was free to go forward. But I dared not go through at once. I went back to the knob on the wall, and found that no amount of pressing or twisting of it would close the door that had opened. Some subtle mechanism within the knob had operated, that needed only a touch of the hand to work it, and the whole end of the corridor had moved out of the way, sliding up in grooves, I *think*, like a portcullis, though of this I am not sure.

"But the door was safely opened, and I passed through it. Moving about, like a blind man in a strange place, I found that I was in a vast inner court, the walls of which sloped away in a great curve. When I discovered this, I came back to the spot where the corridor opened into the court, and then walked straight out into the court itself.

"It was steps that I encountered: the first broad steps of what was evidently a staircase of titanic proportions. And I went up, slowly, carefully, feeling before me every foot of the way. It was only the feel of the staircase under me that gave

reality to it, for as far as I could see, I was simply climbing up into empty space. It was weird beyond telling.

"Up and up I went, until I was all of a hundred feet above the ground, and then the staircase narrowed, the sides drew together. A few more steps, and I came out on a flat floor again, which, after some groping about I found to be a broad landing with high railed edges. I crawled across this landing on hands and knees and then struck against another wall and in it, another door. I went through this too, still crawling, and though everything about me was still invisible, I sensed that I was no longer in the open air, but in a great room.

"I stopped short, and then, as I crouched on the floor, I felt a sudden prescience of evil, entity that was native here. Nothing I could see, or hear, but strong upon my brain beat the thought of something infinitely ancient, infinitely evil, of some malignant, menacing that was a part of this place. Was it a consciousness, I wonder, of the horror that had filled the place in ages long dead? Whatever caused it, I could go no farther in the face of the terror that possessed me; so I drew back and walked to the edge of the landing, leaning over its high, invisible railing and surveying the scene below.

"The setting sun hung like a

great ball of red-hot iron in the western sky, and in its lurid rays the two great statues cast long shadows on the yellow sands. Not far away, my two camels, hobbled, moved restlessly about. To all appearances I was standing on thin air, a hundred feet or more above the ground, but in my mind's eye I had a picture of the great courts and corridors below me, through which I had felt my way.

"As I mused there in the red light, it was clear to me that this was the great temple of the city. What a sight it must have been, in the time of the city's life! I could imagine the long procession of priests and people, in somber and gorgeous robes, coming out from the city, between the great statues and down the long avenue, dragging with them, perhaps, an unhappy prisoner to sacrifice to their god in this, his temple.

"THE SUN was now dipping beneath the horizon, and I turned to go, but before ever I moved, I became rigid and my heart seemed to stand still. For on the farther edge of the clear stretch of sand that lay beneath the temple and the city, a hole suddenly appeared in the sand, springing into being on the desert's face exactly like the one I had seen at my campfire the night before. I watched, as fascinated as by the eyes of a

snake. And before my eyes, another and another appeared, not in a straight line, but in a zigzag fashion. Two such holes would be punched down on one side, then two more on the other side, then one in the middle, making a series of tracks, perhaps two yards in width from side to side, and advancing straight toward the temple and myself. And I could see nothing!

"It was like — the comparison suddenly struck me — like the tracks a many-legged insect might make in the sand, only magnified to unheard-of proportions. And with that thought, the truth rushed on me, for I remembered the spider carved on the ruins and on the statues, and I knew now what it had signified to the dwellers in the city. What was it the inscription had said? *'The evil god of the city, who has been there from the beginning of time.'* And as I saw those tracks advancing toward me, I knew that the city's ancient evil god still dwelt here, and that I was in his temple, alone and unarmed.

"What strange creatures might there not have been in the dawn of time? And this one, this gigantic monster in a spider's form — had not those who built the city found it here when they came, and, in awe, taken it as the city's god, and built for it the mighty temple in which I now stood? And they, who had the wisdom and art to make



this vast fane invisible, not to be seen by human eyes, had they done the same to their god, and made of him almost a true god, invisible, powerful, undying? Undying! Almost it must have been, to survive the ages as it had done. Yet I knew that even some kinds of parrots live for centuries, and what could I know of this monstrous relic of dead ages? And when the city died and crumbled, and the victims were no longer brought to its lair in the temple, did it not live, as I thought, by ranging the desert? No wonder the Arabs had feared the country in this direction! It would be death for anything that came even within view of such a horror, that could clutch and spring and chase, and yet remain always unseen. And was it death for me?

"Such were some of the thoughts that pounded through my brain, as I watched death approach, with those steadily advancing tracks in the sand. And now the paralysis of terror that had gripped me was broken, and I ran down the great staircase, and into the court. I could think of no place in that great hall where I might hide. Imagine hiding in a place where all is invisible! But I must go some place, and finally I dashed past the foot of the great staircase until I reached a wall directly under the landing on which I had stood, and against

this I crouched, praying that the deepening shadows of dusk might hide me from the gaze of the creature whose lair this was.

"I KNEW instantly when the thing entered the gate through which I too had come. Pad, pad, pad — that was the soft, cushioned sound of its passage. I heard the feet stop for a moment by the opened door at the end of the corridor. Perhaps it was in surprise that the door was open, I thought, for how could I know how great or little intelligence lay in that unseen creature's brain? Then pad, pad — across the court it came, and I heard the soft sound of its passing as it ascended the staircase. Had I not been afraid to breathe, I would have almost screamed with relief.

"Yet still fear held me, and I remained crouched against the wall while the thing went up the great stairs. Imagine that scene! All around me was absolutely nothing visible, nothing but the great flat circle of sand that lay a foot below me; yet I saw the place with my mind's eye, and knew of the walls and courts that lay about me, and the thing above me, in fear of which I was crouching there in the gathering darkness.

"The sound of feet above me had ceased, and I judged that the thing had gone into the great room above, which I had feared to enter. Now, if ever, was the

time to make my escape in the darkness; so I rose, with infinite carefulness, and softly walked across the court to the door that led into the corridor. But when I had walked only half of the distance, as I thought, I crashed squarely into another invisible wall across my path, and fell backward, the metal handle of the sheath-knife at my belt striking the flooring with a loud clang. God help me, I had misjudged the position of the door, and had walked straight into the wall, instead!

"I lay there, motionless, with cold fear flooding every part of my being. Then, pad, pad — the soft steps of the thing across the landing, and then silence for a moment. Could it see me from the landing? I wondered. Could it? For a moment, hope warmed me, as no sound came, but the next instant I knew that death had me by the throat, for pad, pad — down the stairs it came.

"With that sound my last vestige of self-control fled and I scrambled to my feet and made another mad dash in the direction of the door. Crash! — into another wall I went, and rose to my feet trembling. There was no sound of footsteps now, and as quietly as I could, I walked into the great court still farther, as I thought, for all my ideas of direction were hopelessly confused. God, what a weird game it was we played

there on that darkened circle of sand!

"No sound whatever came from the thing that hunted me, and my hope flickered up again. And with a dreadful irony, it was at that exact moment that I walked straight into the thing. My outstretched hand touched and grasped what must have been one of its limbs, thick and cold and hairy, which was instantly torn from my grasp and then seized me again, while another and another clutched me also. The thing had stood quite still, leaving me to walk directly into its grasp — the drama of the spider and the fly!

"A moment only it held me, for that cold grasp filled me with such deep, shuddering abhorrence that I wrenched myself loose and fled madly across the court, stumbling again on the first step of the great staircase. I raced up the stairs, and even as I ran I heard the thing in pursuit.

"UP I WENT, and across the landing, and grasped the edge of the railing, for I meant to throw myself down from there, to a clean death on the floor below. But under my hands, the top of the railing moved, one of the great blocks that evidently made up its top was loosened and rocked toward me. In a flash I grasped the great block and staggered across the landing with it in my arms, to the

head of the staircase. Two men could hardly have lifted it, I think, yet I did more, in a sudden access of mad strength; for as I heard that monster coming swiftly up the great stairs, I raised the block, invisible as ever, above my head, and sent it crashing down the staircase upon the place where I thought the thing was at that moment.

"For an instant after the crash there was silence, and then a low humming sound began, that waxed into a loud droning. And at the same time, at a spot half-day down the staircase where the block had crashed, a thin, purple liquid seemed to well out of the empty air, giving form to a few of the invisible steps as it flowed over them, and outlining, too, the block I had thrown, and a great hairy limb that lay crushed beneath it, and from which the fluid that was the monster's blood was oozing. I had not killed the thing, but had chained it down with the block that held it prisoner.

"There was a thrashing sound on the staircase, and the purple stream ran more freely, and by the outline of its splashes, I saw, dimly, the monstrous god that had been known in Mamurth in ages past. It was like a giant spider, with angled limbs that were yards long, and a hairy, repellent body. Even as I stood there, I wondered that the thing, invisible as it was, was yet visible by the life-blood in it, when that

blood was spilled. Yet so it was, nor can I even suggest a reason. But one glimpse I got of its half-visible, purple-splashed outline, and then, hugging the farther side of the stairs, I descended. When I passed the thing, the intolerable odor of a crushed insect almost smothered me, and the monster itself made frantic efforts to loosen itself and spring at me. But it could not, and I got safely down, shuddering and hardly able to walk.

"Straight across the great court I went, and ran shakily through the corridor, and down the long avenue, and out between the two great statues. The moonlight shone on them, and the tablets of inscriptions stood out clearly on the sides of the statues, with their strange symbols and carved spider forms. But I knew now what their message was!

"It was well that my camels had wandered into the ruins, for such was the fear that struck through me that I would never have returned for them had they lingered by the invisible wall. All that night I rode to the north, and when morning came I did not stop, but still pushed north. And as I went through the mountain pass, one camel stumbled and fell, and in falling burst open all my water supplies that were lashed on its back.

"No water at all was left, but I still held north, killing the other camel by my constant

speed, and then staggered on, afoot. On hands and knees I crawled forward, when my legs gave out, always north, away from that temple of evil and its evil god. And tonight, I had been crawling, how many miles I do not know, and I saw your fire. And that is all."

HE LAY BACK exhausted, and Mitchell and I looked at each other's faces in the firelight. Then, rising, Mitchell strode to the edge of our camp and looked for a long time at the moonlit desert, which lay toward the south. What his thoughts were, I do not know. I was nursing my own, as I watched the man who lay beside our fire.

It was early the next morning that he died, muttering about great walls around him. We wrapped his body securely, and bearing it with us held our way across the desert.

In Algiers we cabled to the friends whose address we found in his moneybelt, and arranged to ship the body to them, for such had been his only request. Later they wrote that he had been buried in the little church-

yard of the New England village that had been his childhood home. I do not think that his sleep there will be troubled by dreams of that place of evil from which he fled. I pray that it will not.

Often and often have Mitchell and I discussed the thing, over lonely campfires and in the inns of the seaport towns. Did he kill the invisible monster he spoke of, and is it lying now, a withered remnant, under the block on the great staircase? Or did it gnaw its way loose; does it still roam the desert and make its lair in the vast, ancient temple, as unseen as itself?

Or, different still, was the man simply crazed by the heat and thirst of the desert, and his tale but the product of a maddened mind? I do not think that this is so. I think that he told truth, yet I do not know. Nor shall I ever know, for never, Mitchell and I have decided, shall we be the ones to venture into the place of hell on earth where that ancient god of evil may still be living, amid the invisible courts and towers, beyond the unseen wall.



# It Is Written . . .

Mr. Reginald Smith of 1509 N. Marles, Santa Ana, California, 92706, has sent us a very handsome letter-size mimeographed pamphlet of 41 pages, entitled *WEIRD TALES in the Thirties*, which is offered for sale at the very reasonable price of 25¢. The cover is a reproduction of Brundage's more or less symbolic illustration for *The Vampire Master* (October 1933), and while I do not agree that this was the weirdest cover Brundage did for WT (generally, her covers weren't particularly weird — but then neither were most of the others on WT — however, I'd select her illustration for *The People of the Black Circle*, September 1934, or *Incense of Abomination*, March 1938, as more nearly weird than this one), it is still one of her more satisfactory offerings. As a reminiscence, the pamphlet is very enjoyable, though I am somewhat less impressed by some of the critical comments.

Smith is certainly correct in noting that *The Eyrle* was no place to go for literary criticism, with a few rare exceptions, and his comment to the effect that some of the recent personal criticisms of Lovecraft tell more about the critics than they do about HPL; and, again, he rightly notes the Rev. Henry S. Whitehead's literary worth and the clay feet on many another idol of the era. However, Whitehead was greatly appreciated by WT's reader. Now, if such favorites of the time as Seabury Quinn and August Derleth were as bad as Smith makes them out to be, how is one to account for the same readers appreciating Clark Ashton Smith and Whitehead, if they were as good as he makes them out to be? It would have been

of more interest to have tried to ascertain not just the flaws in writers such as Quinn, Derleth, Howard, etc., who hardly conceived of themselves as faultless, but just what there was about them that made them so popular despite their shortcomings, particularly the first two, since he does give a bit of insight on Howard, though little more than others have.

I was fascinated enough by his selection of the favorites to make my own survey, going through the 1930 issues of WT and noting the authors of the stories which were voted "best" in the various issues. Wright's system of scoring was not too good a one, and he did not always list the top three stories — if one was apparently far in the lead, that was all that was mentioned — but Wright's reports are all we have to go on, since the published letters represent a considerably smaller fraction of the readership. Giving the author of the best-liked story in each issue 3 points, the second 2, and the third 1, the highest score any author could obtain in any one year would be 36 points (less than 36 in 1931, when there were only 9 issues, and in 1936 and 1939 when there were only 11.). The score comes out like this: 1930 — Quinn (18), all de Grandin stories: 1931 — Lovecraft (9); 1932 — Smith (11); 1933 — Howard (15), the year when Conan really got going: 1934 — Howard (11), and C. L. Moore racked up 10; 1935 — Paul Ernst (11); 1936 — Howard (11), and Robert Bloch received 10; 1937 — Quinn/Lovecraft tied with 6; 1938 — Quinn (15); and 1939 — Quinn (6), most of the stories in these last three years not de Grandin tales.

On the overall score for the 30's,

Seabury Quinn has a substantial lead (78); Robert E. Howard (65); Clark Ashton Smith (37); then H. P. Lovecraft ties with C. L. Moore for 30, and Robert Bloch ties with Edmond Hamilton for 22; Donald Wandrei has 12, and E. Hoffmann Price, Paul Ernst, and David H. Keller all tie with 11. Keller's showing is particularly good, since he had only ten stories in WT during the 30's, fewer than any of the others named. (I gave 3 points only to a serial no matter how many separate installments came out first place, so long as one of them did.)

But I trust you will not be put aside by my exceptions. If you are a devotee of the old WEIRD TALES, you will want a copy of Reginald Smith's pamphlet.

CHARLES HIDLEY writes from New York City, "I guess that it's been over twenty years since I read *The Blind Spot*, and mine isn't the most retentive of memories, but surely Knight's evaluation of Austin Hall would not include *Almost Immortal*, certainly the best of the Summer issue's entries, and the best in the last few as well. Outside of its own merit as a yarn, it has the added distinction of acting as a valuable "present" counterbalance to the meretricious and vulgar kind of penny-dreadful writing exemplified by Scotten's *Thing in the House* — I don't give it a rating since it doesn't belong in the magazine.

"With rather creepy coincidence I had read (just the evening before) in an old 1930 WEIRD TALES I'd just obtained, another Robert E. Howard tale with another Brill as protagonist — possibly a younger brother — entitled *The Horror From the Mound*. Talk about your spine-chillers! Your current mongol-rama was OK, I guess, and its mysterious lineage was fun, but I think of it only as the salad between such courses as Keller's superb *Heredity* and thee Hall.

"I don't own *Life Everlasting* and

I'm not sure what's in it, — possibly more selections for MOH?"

Howard seemed to like the name "Brill" as he used it a number of times — not in each instance as the lead. Congratulations upon finding a copy of the May 1932 WEIRD TALES, a good issue which featured Clark Ashton Smith's *Vaults of Yoh-Vombis*, Hugh B. Cave's *Brotherhood of Blood*, an installment of Seabury Quinn's only serial in WT, *The Devil's Bride*, Edmond Hamilton's *The Terror Planet*, and a better-than-usual Arlton Eadie tale, *The Nameless Mummy*, in addition to the Howard story and others. WT readers on the whole did not care for *The Horror from the Mound* at the time, since the author paid little or no attention to the rules of vampirology as laid down by Bram Stoker in *Dracula*. My own feeling is that while this was not top-level Howard, it was not anywhere near so bad as the published reader-reaction indicated.

The volume, *Life Everlasting*, contains, in addition to the title novel: *The Boneless Horror*, *Unto Us a Child is Born*, *No More Tomorrows*, *The Thing in the Cellar*, *The Dead Woman*, *Heredity*, *The Face in the Mirror*, *The Cerebral Library*, *A Piece of Linoleum*, and *The Thirty and One*.

In relation to the lineage of *Valley of the Lost*, we were all wrong, as the letter below shows:

Just as the Summer issue of MOH was being printed, in came a letter from GLENN LORD: "Six boxes of Robert E. Howard's papers and files were just uncovered by me, where they had been lost for the past twenty years approximately. And, by all the gods, *The Valley of the Lost* with annotations by editor Bates is among the papers. And it is not the same as *King of the Lost People*, alas for us. . . . The lead character in the original "Valley" is named Reynolds, and Bates

# Have You Missed Any of Our Previous Issues?

*Many readers have asked us if back issues of MAGAZINE OF HORROR are still available. The answer is — yes, for the time being, they are; but some issues are not so plentiful as they were. While they last, they can all be had for the cover price of 50¢ per copy, postpaid.*

**#1, August 1963:** The Man With a Thousand Legs, Frank Belknap Long; A Thing of Beauty, Wallace West; The Yellow Sign, Robert W. Chambers; The Maze and the Monster, Edward D. Hoch; The Death of Halpin Frayser, Ambrose Bierce; Babylon: 70 M., Donald A. Wollheim; The Inexperienced Ghost, H. G. Wells; The Unbeliever, Robert Silverberg; Fidel Bassin, W. J. Stamper; The Last Dawn, Frank Lillie Pollock, The Undying Head, Mark Twain.

**#2, November 1963:** The Space-Eaters, Frank Belknap Long; The Faceless Thing, Edward D. Hoch; The Red Room, H. G. Wells; Hungary's Female Vampire, Dean Lipton; A Tough Tussle, Ambrose Bierce; Doorslammer, Donald A. Wollheim; The Electric Chair, George Waight; The Other One, Jerry L. Keane; The Charmer, Archie Binns; Clarissa, Robert A. W. Lowndes; The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes, Rudyard Kipling.

**#3, February 1964:** The Seeds of Death, David H. Keller; The Seeking Thing, Janet Hirsch; A Vision of Judgment, H. G. Wells; The Place of the Pythons, Arthur J.

Burks; Jean Bouchon, S. Baring-Gould; The Door, Rachel Cosgrove Payes; One Summer Night, Ambrose Bierce; Luella Miller, Mary Wilkins-Freeman; They That Wait, H. S. W. Campbell; The Repairer of Reputations, Robert W. Chambers.

**#4, May 1964:** Out of print.

**#5, September 1964:** Cassius, Henry S. Whitehead; Love at First Sight, J. L. Miller; Five-Year Contract, J. Vernon Shea; The House of the Worm, Merle Prout; The Beautiful Suit, H. G. Wells; A Stranger Came to Reap, Stephen Dentinger; The Morning the Birds Forgot to Sing, Walt Liebscher; Bones, Donald A. Wollheim; The Ghostly Rental, Henry James.

**#6, November 1964:** Caverns of Horror, Laurence Manning; Prodigy, Walt Liebscher; The Mask, Robert W. Chambers; The Life-After-Death of Mr. Thaddeus Warde, Robert Barbour Johnson; The Feminine Fraction, David Grinnell; Dr. Heidegger's Experiment, Nathaniel Hawthorne; The Pacer, August Derleth; The Moth, H. G. Wells; The Door to Saturn, Clark Ashton Smith.

*(Turn to Pages 125/126 for further list of Contents)*

**Order Back Issues From Page 128**



was to have blurred it, 'Deep in Ghost Cave an old feud is settled'. There seems to be quite a bit of unpublished REH in the boxes, all mixed up as it is."

Mr. Lord sent us the mss. in question and there is no doubt that this is, indeed, the right story this time. We hope to offer it to you at a later time, but will have to change the title, alas.

GARY MORRIS writes from Cincinnati, "I am very pleased with your 'Books' section and would like very much to see it expanded."

This will depend upon the books we receive for review, and the way space is available for reviews. Readers have indicated that they like the departments in MOH but majority feeling is that they should not be included (or run to much length) when so doing would crowd out a story, and we concur with this feeling.

After expressing disapproval of the cover, CHESTER MALON JR. of St. Louis adds: "I have two suggestions: the first is that you keep science-fiction out of MOH — pure out-and-out s-f, that is. There is quite a bit of s-f which is actually horror in meaning and content. The second is that you try to use some horror stories by news writers. . . . In a recent issue, you ran a story called, *The Man in the Dark*. Unless I'm mistaken I believe you stated that the story was by a new author and was his first attempt at a horror story. He succeeded admirably. . . . This is the kind of story that is well worth the price of the magazine."

Irwin Ross, Ph.D. is not entirely a "new" author as he has published psychological articles for a number of years, and we have run a number of them in our publication *REAL LIFE GUIDE TO SEX AND MARRIAGE*; and he

is, in fact, a contributing editor to that magazine. *The Man in the Dark* was, however, the first piece of fiction we had ever seen from him.

JOHN ANDERT writes from Walker, Minn.: "The cover was attractive but I still think that the one with gore dripping from the letters was best; but keep on experimenting with different logotypes."

The cover on Issue #13 was very controversial, and brought forth many strong statements of both approval and disapproval. It will yet be a good long time before we know whether Gray Morrow's very fine painting for issue #12 was of substantial benefit to us in the sales department. Many of you thought that the logo on #13 was less good than that on #12; we agree that the one on #12 was more artistic, but it simply could not be seen as well as the one on #13. A definite majority of those of you who have written agree that both are to be preferred to the dripping-blood logo used earlier.

We consider all new stories submitted to us carefully, even though we are presently overstocked, but the percentage of them we receive that show any signs of freshness and skill in achieving horror is very very small; of course, as you know, we are not restricted to horror tales, but would like to use more new ones than we do. . . . One difficulty with the new writer is that this person often shows ability but simply is not familiar enough with the field to know what has been overworked, so that what is offered us by a new writer, in all sincerity, is often a story using very old themes handled in what has become the "usual" manner. There's no such thing as perfect originality, of course! The trick is to tell one of the few basic old stories in such a manner as to give it a fresh appearance. If I could tell aspiring authors

how to do this I would, but I can't — even if I did it myself, I could not tell you how I did it in any meaningful way which would be of help to you.

GEORGE KENEBORUS of Lewiston, Maine, explains his objections to the science fiction horror story thus: "I don't think they (the two elements) are mutually exclusive as long as they are both handled with equal respect. My major objection would be an economic one. There are half a dozen science fiction magazines on the newsstands, all well established, whereas there are only two that deal even partly with horror stories. I fear that the competition is too great in the science fiction field and you'd stand a better chance of survival in competition with the two magazines in the fantasy field."

And still they come! BOB RIGHETTI writes from Montclair, Columbia: "At this moment I'm quite disturbed over the appearance of certain quibblings concerning the relationship of Horror to Science Fiction. This is absurd, and really quite minute. If any . . . think that horror is better than SF, or that SF is better than horror, they are only causing themselves pain where there is no need for any. Actually, SF and Horror depend upon each other for their sepulchral moods, their action scenes, explanations for all phenomena (which sometimes ruins the story) and a plausible way of keeping the reader with at least one foot on the ground.

"I'm quite astounded by the spurious conjectures that repeatedly arise whenever the discussion is resumed. The question to ask, really, is where Mary Shelley would have been if she had said that the monster in her *Frankenstein* was really a familiar and not the creation of a brilliant scientist. If it had not been for Horror, Science Fiction would be lost in a

## HAVE YOU MISSED ANY OF OUR EARLIER ISSUES?

**#7, January 1965: The Thing From — Outside, George Allan England; Black Thing at Midnight, Joseph Payne Brennan; The Shadows on the Wall, Mary Wilkins-Freeman; The Phantom Farmhouse, Seabury Quinn; The Oblong Box, Edgar Allan Poe; A Way With Kids, Ed M. Clinton; The Devil of the Marsh, E. B. Marriott-Watson; The Shuttered Room, H. P. Lovecraft & August Derleth.**

**#8, April 1965: The Black Laugh, William J. Makin; The Hand of Glory, R. H. D. Barham; The Garrison, David Grinnell; Passeur, Robert W. Chambers; The Lady of the Velvet Collar, Washington Irving; Jack, Reynold Junker; The Burglar-Proof Vault, Oliver Taylor; The Dead Who Walk, Ray Cummings.**

**#9, June 1965: The Night Wire, H. F. Arnold; Sacrilege, Wallace West; All the Stain of Long Delight, Jerome Clark; Skulls in the Stars, Robert E. Howard; The Photographs, Richard Marsh; The Distortion out of Space, Francis Flagg; Guarantee Period, William M. Danner; Teh Door in the Wall, H. G. Wells; The Three Low Masses, Alphonse Daudet; The Whistling Room, William Hope Hodgson.**

## ORDER FROM PAGE 127

### Don't Forget!

Our 15th Issue will be dated Spring 1967.

*On sale early in December.*

## HAVE YOU MISSED ANY OF OUR EARLIER ISSUES?

#10, August 1965: *The Girl at Haddon's*, Pauline Kappel Priluck; *The Torture of Hope*, Villiers de L'Isle-Adam; *The Cloth of Madness*, Seabury Quinn; *The Tree*, Gerald W. Page; *In the Court of the Dragon*, Robert W. Chambers; *Flacide's Wife*, Kirk Mashburn; *Come Closer*, Joanna Russ; *The Plague of the Living Dead*, A. Hyatt Verrill.

#11, November 1965: *The Empy Zoo*, Edward D. Hoch; *A Psychological Shipwreck*, Ambrose Bierce; *The Call of the Mech-Men*, Laurence Manning; *Was It a Dream?*, Guy de Maupassant; *Under the Hau Tree*, Katherine Yates; *The Head of Du Bois*, Dorothy Norman Cooke; *The Dweller in Dark Valley*, (verse), Robert E. Howard; *The Devil's Pool*, Grege la Spina.

#12, Winter 1965/66: *The Faceless God*, Robert Bloch; *Master Nicholas*, Seabury Quinn; *But Not the Herald*, Roger Zelazny; *Dr. Munding, Exorcist*, Gordon MacCreagh; *The Affair at 7 Rue de M.*, John Steinbeck; *The Man in the Dark*, Irwin Ross; *The Abyss*, Robert A. W. Lowndes; *Destination* (verse), Robert E. Howard; *Memories of HPL*, Muriel E. Eddy; *The Black Beast*, Henry S. Whitehead.

#13, Summer 1966: *The Thing in the House*, H. F. Scotten; *Divine Madness*, Roger Zelazny; *Valley of the Lost*, Robert E. Howard; *Heredit*, David H. Keller; *Dwelling of the Righteous*, Anna Hunger; *Almost Immortal*, Austin Hall.

## ORDER FROM PAGE 127

maze of thoughtless theories and emaciated heroes. But where would Horror be if science had not stepped in? Why . . . still in the Gothic Castle, with Ole Horace Walpole and A. Radcliffe!"

In the past, we have offered you a few science fiction tales with a bizarre angle; and since you voted in large numbers for a reprint of the remaining "Stranger Club" stories by Clarence Manning — even though, as we warned you, the other three are not horror stories — we are offering you *The Moth Message* in this current issue. However, as you will see elsewhere in this issue, it will no longer be necessary to use space in MOH in order to bring you the other two tales in the series, and this will be the final science fiction story to appear in MOH which we would agree is science fiction and not horror at all.

GEORGE H. WELLS writes from Riverhead, New York: "... *Divine Madness*, though not the kind of story I expected to find in MOH, was very great and rates high in literary quality and in message content. . . .

"... I rate *Heredit* high because it's the only story that made me afraid to turn off the light and try to go to sleep. . . ."

The number of you who wrote in either to rate or comment at length upon the contents of our 13th issue was very gratifying, and we trust you will realize that the fact a quotation did not appear from your letter or coupon does not mean that we did not read it and make careful notations of what you were saying — physically upon our score sheet, mentally in relation to your wishes for the future. Both *Divine Madness* and *Heredit* were very controversial stories, bringing forth a considerable number of extreme votes on each end of the scale. RAWL

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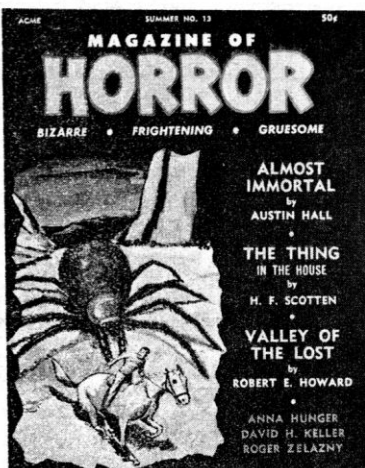
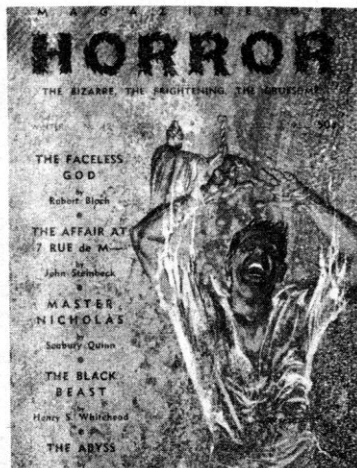
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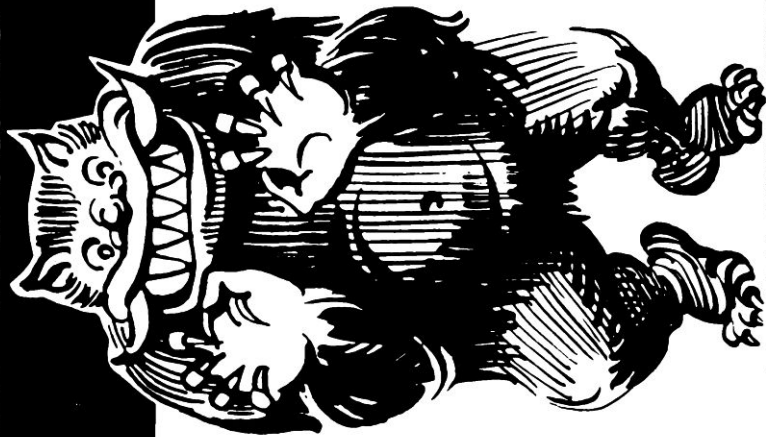
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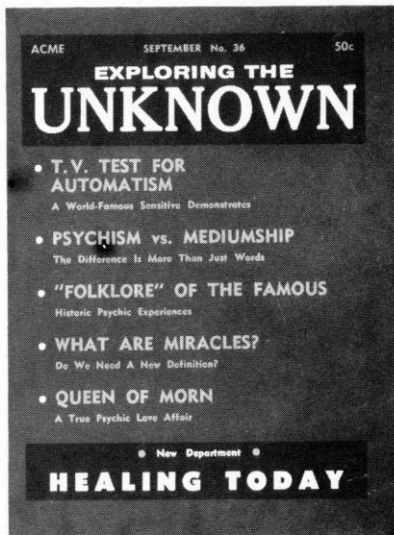
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