

Witchcraft & Sorcery

NUMBER 9

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Witchcraft &

SORCERY

THE MODERN MAGAZINE OF WEIRD TALES

(formerly COVEN 13)

NUMBER 9

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Interiors by Stephen E. Fabian, Steve Fritz, Hugh Rankin (reprints), and Jeff Jones.

GERALD W PAGE

editor

SUSAN BURGE

assistant editor

Associate Editors:

Scott Edelstein & Hank Reinhardt

Editorial Address:

P. O. Box 1331,
Atlanta, Ga. 30301

JERRY BURGE

art director

WM. L. CRAWFORD

publisher

Publisher's Address:

1855 W. Main St.,
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THE READER'S EYRIE

After being missing for two issues, the letter column is back. Our logic is that the editor can still get his ideas in but now so can the readers.

Before we get to the letters, we'd like to mention the first four stories in this issue. They were done especially for *Sorcery* by writers who accepted the challenge of writing stories around four titles dreamed up by the staff. The result is an interesting trick but more than that: four interesting stories. And why not? We were smart enough to go after some excellent writers.

That's right. Gahan Wilson is the same fellow who draws those cartoons for *Fantasy* and *Science Fiction*, *Playboy* and *National Lampoon*. His short stories have been gaining added laurels this year and "Yesterday's Witch" is a remarkable story. Gans T. Field used to write for *Weird Tales* and is well known as the creator of Judge Pursuivant. His story in this issue is the first of a series about Lee Cobbett. Dale C. Donaldson ("Sergi") is the editor of *Moonbroth*, a horror publication you can learn about by writing P. O. Box C, Bellevue, Wash. 98009. Carleton Grindle is principally identified with *Sorcery*, having written "Momentary Ghost" and "the Castle at the World's Edge" for us.

Next issue we hope to bring you something else a bit special: "Othuum." This is a round robin short novel written by Brian Lumley, David Gerrold, Emil Petaja, Miriam Allen de Ford and Ross Rocklynne. The result is a strong, off-beat horror yarn. We haven't selected the other stories for the issue but have Stephen Goldin, E. Hoffmann Price, Robert E. Howard, Eddy C. Bertin and others to choose from.

Dear Mr. Page,

Comments on issue No. 8 of *SORCERY*:

"Sergi" was the best story of the issue. It combined a fresh, new idea, e.g. that evil beings exist at the edge of the universe waiting for a human dreamer to give them a new body, with a strongly developed plot. I call this kind of story physical horror ("Thirst" and "Price of a Demon" were in the same category) and it is my favorite type. Like the other two, "Sergi" supplies a supernatural explanation for the plot, rather than a scientific one, something I very much enjoy in an era where many writers of horror give in and supply scientific explanations for their horrors. "Sergi" also holds nothing back, e.g. is not squeamish and carries its plot to its natural conclusion. Fine story; the only change I would have made in it would have been to have made it five times longer.

"Gola's Hell" was an attempt at a more subtle, some would say more sophisticated type of horror. I enjoy and support this type of story and hope to see occasional stories of this type in future issues. Lovecraft used this type to create some of his very best stories. BUT this story was too subtle. I enjoy brief hints that lead up to a momentary glimpse of a monster but the subtle hints in this story lead to nothing. It was as if the reader were being asked to

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supply his own ending. I felt the story to be incomplete. Subtlety and brief hints do not justify lack of a climax!

"Castle at the World's Edge" was a very good story but I felt that it was only a horror story in a marginal sense. It seemed more a fantasy with elements of horror. At certain key points the allegory overpowered the plot of the story and made me wonder whether in trying to make his allegorical point the author lost control of the plot. I really think a story like this belongs in *Fantastic* rather than in *Sorcery*. Perhaps the author can strengthen the horror element in the sequel and make it seem more an intrinsic part of the story, not something tacked on for effect.

Art: The front cover was magnificent; it was so good I bought an extra copy of the issue so I could frame it. Overall I find D. Bruce Berry to be your best artist. I hope to see a cover by him soon. He captures the stark horror of the true supernatural tale by delineating in great detail what that horror would look like. Fabian & R. Edwards Jennings both drew well and reflected the spirit of the stories they were illustrating flawlessly. Fabian's light and dark illo (p. 17) was superior but it pointed out the central weakness of the story, e.g. its overwhelming allegorical nature. I enjoyed the Hannes Bok painting very much also but I can't see how Petaja got the story he wrote from that picture.

Very enjoyable were the article on the Dracula dinner and Hoffman Price's column. Price's column would be worth printing just because he was one of the original Lovecraftians and it would add great stature to the mag., but it also stands on its own very well and would be worth printing if the author were unknown. So it is a double bonus. Please try to include in every issue.

Overall this was a very good issue. I can understand how it is necessary to feature as many types of horror as possible to attract as wide a readership as possible, and this issue was very interesting in its successful balancing of three major types. I hope however that you will never fall into a formula and will always have room for even the most offbeat type of horror. In the final analysis that was what made WT great. Good luck.

—David J. Brown, P.O. Box 1425, Boston, Mass. 02104

P. S.: I really wish you had a letter page. It would add great interest to the magazine...

We are trying to offer as balanced a line-up of stories as we can, but will probably have to go to a shorter maximum length to guarantee this. Or increase pages. One of our major problems is where to draw the line. Although I don't think he ever saw it, my feeling is that the editor of *Fantastic* would reject "Castle." That may be unfair to say, but the point is I think it belongs in *Sorcery* and simply couldn't go anywhere else at this time. Some stories do overlap—I think the Wilson and Tubb stories in this issue would find homes in other magazines almost instantly regardless of their 'types.' But "Castle" was clearly in the tradition of Howard, Dunsany and Haggard which I don't think any other magazine is interested in.

We have a fine poster available of the cover of No. 8. It sells for \$1 a copy (from the Calif. address), is truer to the colors of the actual painting by Jerry Burge and has no lettering. But specify the *Sorcery* cover because we also have a poster available at the same price which is a reproduction of a Burge painting for an unpublished issue of the magazine *Spaceway*.

We hope to run features in future issues not only on the Dracula Society, but on other fantasy oriented societies,

such as the various creative anachronism societies around the country. We hope to get photos of one of their medieval style tournaments. —GWP

Dear Mr. Page,

Comparing the old Coven 13 publisher with your present one, I think chances of *Sorcery* surviving are better at the present under the auspices of Bill Crawford, who seems to have a genuine interest in publishing fantasy. (How true. Now if he only possessed the Midas touch there wouldn't be all of these long delays! —B.C.)

These hopes of mine were almost dashed after No. 6. Finally No. 7 came out, after approximately 9 months of waiting! The interval between 7 and 8 was short, though, so perhaps you're back to your regular bi-monthly schedule.

Some of your readers seem disturbed upon finding swords-and-sorcery tales in your magazine. *Weird Tales* certainly had yarns of this sort. So I hope you live up to your subtitle ("The Modern Magazine of WEIRD TALES") and publish them, if they're good.

Here are my suggestions for improving the magazine:

1. Resurrect the Grimoire—a fascinating column, although only featured once.
2. Run longer fiction, like serials, occasionally.
3. Get rid of "cute" features like "Superdragon" or a few of the "cute" "Pointed Tales."
4. Establish a book review column or cover books in "Grimoire."

Otherwise I'm satisfied. As to book reviews I think most readers would enjoy coverage of fantasy books published by Arkham House, Donald Grant, Mirage and others. An occasional film review would also be interesting. Oh, another suggestion: start publishing the Reader's Poll results.

I hope you consider my ideas and publish them, as I'd like to know what other readers think of them.

—Matthew Witt, Pittsburg, Kansas

Apologies for not listing your ratings for the past four issues, but we haven't had the space. Same is true for the Readers' Poll, but we certainly take note of every letter, every comment we receive. When the magazine is more stable, we expect to be able to reinstate the poll feature.

Features are sometimes added as a last-minute thing when we discover we have room we hadn't expected. Jade Pagoda, of course, is the exception. It could well be the most highly regarded feature in the field right now. We'll try to have it every issue.

We plan to publish a minimum of three issues a year and hope to establish a four-issue-a-year schedule. It's all a matter of picking up additional newsstand sale. If you know of any dealer in your area who would like to handle the mag, let us know, or better yet, give him our Calif. address. If not, why not consider the idea of purchasing five extra copies at 40 per cent discount and selling them to friends and acquaintances. We are slowly developing such a market. Also we have been informed by some of those firms running ads in the mag that they've been getting excellent results. Since we now are greatly dependent on advertising revenue, we appreciate this indirect support.

No book column yet, but when I can, I'll run a short listing of books received starting with next issue. In order for your book to be mentioned in this column, whether or not you are running an ad in the issue, you **must** send a copy to Gerald W Page, P.O. Box 1331, Atlanta, Ga. 30301.

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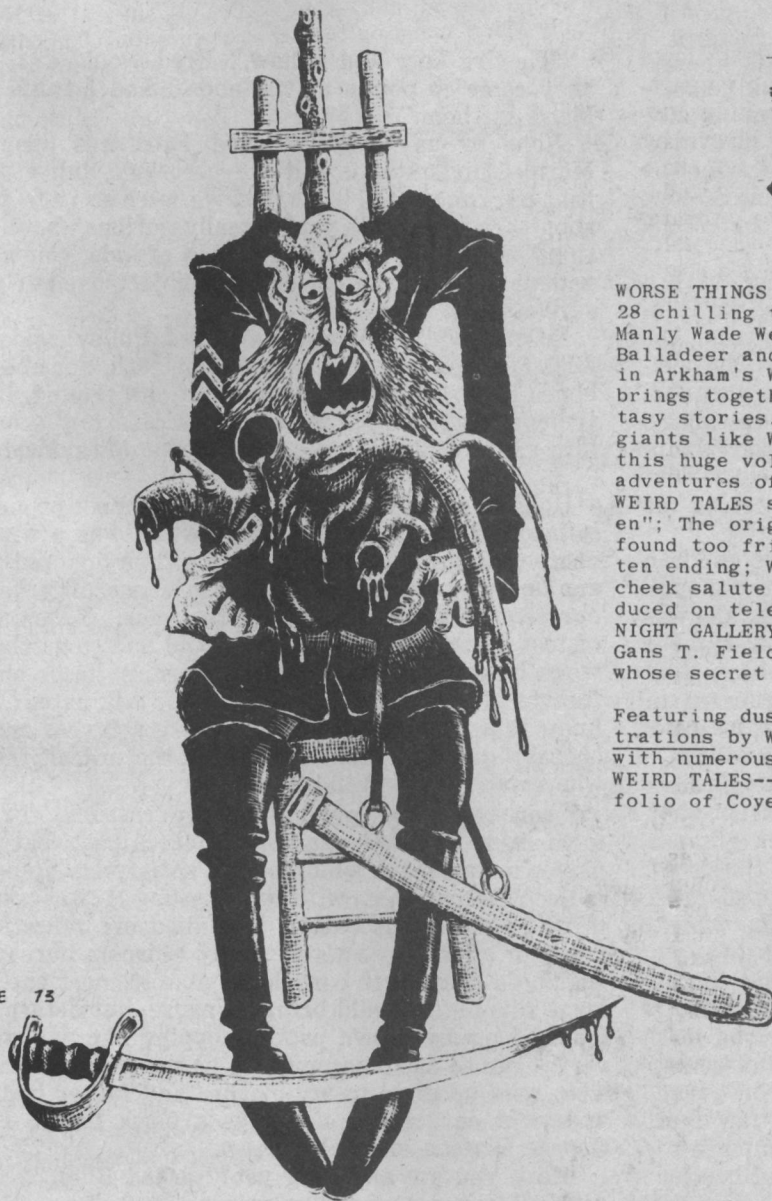
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YESTERDAY'S WITCH

By GAHAN WILSON

Illustration by Stephen E. Fabian

HER HOUSE IS GONE, NOW. Someone tore it down and bulldozed away her trees and set up an ugly apartment building made of cheap bricks and cracking concrete on the flattened place they'd built. I drove by there a few nights ago; I'd come back to town for the first time in years to give a lecture at the university, and I saw blue TV flickers glowing in the building's living rooms.

Her house sat on a small rise, I remember, with a wide stretch of scraggly lawn between it and the iron-work fence which walled off her property from the sidewalk and the rest of the outside world. The windows of her house peered down at you through a thick tangle of oak tree branches, and I can remember walking by and knowing she was peering out at me and hunching up my shoulders. because I couldn't help it, but never, ever, giving her the satisfaction of seeing me hurry because of fear.

To the adults she was Miss Marble, but we children knew better. We knew she had another name, though none of us knew just what it was, and we knew she was a witch. I don't know who it was told me first about Miss Marble's being a witch; it might have been Billy Drew. I think it was, but I had already guessed in spite of being less than six. I grew up, all of us grew up, sure and certain of Miss Marble's being a witch.

You never managed to get a clear view of Miss Marble, or I don't ever remember doing so, except that once. You just got peeks and hints. A quick glimpse of her wide, short body as she scuttled up the front porch steps; a brief hint of her brown-wrapped form behind a thick clump of bushes by the garage where, it was said, an electric runabout sat rusting away; a sudden flash of her fantastically wrinkled face in the narrowing slot of a closing door, and that was all.

Fred Pulley claimed he had gotten a good long look at her one afternoon. She had been weeding, or something, absorbed at digging in the ground, and off-guard and careless even though she stood a mere few feet from the fence. Fred had fought down his impulse to keep on going by, and he had stood and studied her for as much as two or three minutes before she looked up and saw him and snarled and turned away.

We never tired of asking Fred about what he had seen.

"Her teeth, Fred," one of us would whisper—you almost always talked about Miss Marble in whispers—"Did you see her teeth?"

"They're long and yellow," Fred would say. "And they come to points at the ends. And I think I saw blood on them."

None of us really believed Fred had seen Miss Marble, understand, and we certainly didn't believe that part about the blood, but we were so very curious about her, and when you're really curious about something, especially if you're a bunch of kids, you want to get all the information on the subject even if you're sure its lies.

So we didn't believe what Fred Pulley said about Miss Marble's having blood on her teeth, nor about the bones he'd seen her pulling out of the ground, but we remembered it all the same, just in case, and it entered into any calculations we made about Miss Marble.

* * * * *

Hallowe'en was the time she figured most prominently in our thoughts. First because she was a witch, of course, and second because of a time-honored ritual among the neighborhood children concerning her and ourselves and that evening of the year. It was a kind of test by fire that every male child had to go through when he reached the age of thirteen, or to be shamed forever after. I have no idea when it originated; I only know that when I attained my thirteenth year and was thereby qualified and doomed for the ordeal, the rite was established beyond question.

I can remember putting on my costume for that memorable Hallowe'en, an old Prince Albert coat and a papier mache mask which bore a satisfying likeness to a decayed cadaver, with the feeling I was girding myself for a great battle. I studied my reflection in a mirror affixed by swivels to my bedroom bureau and wondered gravely if I would be able to meet the challenge this night would bring. Unsure, but determined, I picked up my brown paper shopping bag, which was very large so as to accomodate as much candy as possible, said goodbye to my mother and father and dog, and went out. I had not gone a block before I met George Watson and Billy Drew.

"Have you got anything yet?" asked Billy.

"No." I indicated the emptiness of my bag. "I just started."

"The same with us," said George. And then he looked at me carefully. "Are you ready?"

"Yes" I said, realizing I had not been ready until that very moment, and feeling an encouraging glow at knowing I was. "I can do it alright."



Mary Taylor and her little sister Betty came up, and so did Eddy Baker and Phil Myers and the Arthur brothers. I couldn't see where they all had come from, but it seemed as if every kid in the neighborhood was suddenly there, crowding around under the street lamp, costume flapping in the wind, holding bags and boxes and staring at me with glistening, curious eyes.

"Do you want to do it now," asked George, "Or do you want to wait?"

George had done it the year before and he had waited.

"I'll do it now," I said.

I began walking along the sidewalk, the others following after me. We crossed Garfield Street and Peabody Street and that brought us to Baline Avenue where we turned left. I could see Miss Marble's iron fence half a block ahead, but I was careful not to slow my pace. When we arrived at the fence I walked to the gate with as firm a tread as I could muster and put my hand upon its latch. The metal was cold and made me think of coffin handles and graveyard diggers' picks. I pushed it down and the gate swung open with a low, rusty groaning.

Now it was up to me alone. I was face to face with the ordeal. The basic terms of it were simple enough: walk down the crumbling path which led through the tall, dry grass to Miss Marble's porch, cross the porch, ring Miss Marble's bell and escape. I had seen George Watson do it last year and I had seen other brave souls do it before him. I knew it was not an impossible task.

It was a chilly night with a strong, persistent wind and clouds scudding overhead. The moon was three-fourths full and it looked remarkably round and solid in the sky. I became suddenly aware, for the first time in my life, that it was a real thing up there. I wondered how many Hallowe'ens it had looked down on and what it had seen.

I pulled the lapels of my Prince Albert coat close about me and started walking down Miss Marble's path. I walked because all the others had run or skulked, and I was resolved to bring new dignity to the test if I possibly could.

From afar the house looked bleak and abandoned, a thing of cold blues and greys and greens, but as I drew nearer a peculiar phenomenon began to assert itself. The windows, which from the sidewalk had seemed only to reflect the moon's glisten, now began to take on a warmer glow; the walls and porch, which had seemed all shriveled, peeling paint and leprous patches of rotting wood now began to appear well-kept. I swallowed and strained my eyes. I had been prepared for a growing feeling of menace, for ever darker shadows, and this increasing evidence of warmth and tidiness absolutely baffled me.

By the time I reached the porch steps the place had taken on a positively cozy feel. I now saw that the building was in excellent repair and that it was well-painted with a smooth coat of reassuring cream. The light from the windows was now unmistakably cheerful, a ruddy, friendly pumpkin kind of orange suggest-

ing crackling fireplaces all set and ready for toasting marshmallows. There was a very unwitchlike clump of Indian corn fixed to the front door, and I was almost certain I detected an odor of sugar and cinnamon wafting into the cold night air.

I stepped onto the porch, gaping. I had anticipated many awful possibilities during this past year. Never far from my mind had been the horrible pet Miss Marble was said to own, a something-or-other which was all claws and scales and flew on wings with transparent webbing. Perhaps, I had thought, this thing would swoop down from the bare oak limbs and carry me off while my friends on the sidewalk screamed and screamed. Again, I had not dismissed the notion Miss Marble might turn me into a frog with a little motion of her fingers and then step on me with her foot and squish me.

But here I was feeling foolish, very young, crossing this friendly porch and smelling, I was sure of it now, sugar and cinnamon and cider and, what's more, butterscotch on top of that. I raised my hand to ring the bell and was astonished at myself for not being the least bit afraid when the door softly opened and there stood Miss Marble herself.

I looked at her and she smiled at me. She was short and plump, and she wore an apron with a thick ruffle all along its edges, and her face was smooth and red and shiny as an Autumn apple. She wore bifocals on the tip of her tiny nose and she had her white hair fixed in a perfectly round bun in the exact center of the top of her head. Delicious odors wafted round her through the open door and I peered greedily past her.

"Well," she said in a mild, old voice, "I am so glad that someone has at last come to have a treat. I've waited so many years, and each year I've been ready, but nobody's come."

She stood to one side and I could see a table in the hall piled with candy and nuts and bowls of fruit and platesful of pies and muffins and cake, all of it shining and glittering in the warm, golden glow which seemed everywhere. I heard Miss Marble chuckle warmly.

"Why don't you call your friends in? I'm sure there will be plenty for all."

I turned and looked down the path and saw them, huddled in the moonlight by the gate, hunched wide-eyed over their boxes and bags. I felt a sort of generous pity for them. I walked to the steps and waved.

"Come on! It's alright!"

They would not budge.

"May I show them something?"

She nodded yes and I went into the house and got an enormous orange-frosted cake with numbers of golden sugar pumpkins on its sides.

"Look," I cried, lifting the cake into the moonlight, "Look at this! And she's got lots more! She always had, but we never asked for it!"

George was the first through the gate, as I knew he would be. Billy came next, and then Eddy, then the rest. They came slowly, at first, timid as mice, but then the smells of chocolate and tangerines and brown sugar

got to their noses and they came faster. By the time they had arrived at the porch they had lost their fear, the same as I, but their astonished faces showed me how I must have looked to Miss Marble when she'd opened the door.

"Come in, children. I'm so glad you've all come at last!"

None of us had ever seen such candy or dared to dream of such cookies and cakes. We circled the table in the hall, awed by its contents, clutching at our bags.

"Take all you want, children. 'It's all for you.'"

Little Betty was the first to reach out. She got a gum drop as big as a plum and was about to pop it into her mouth when Miss Marble said:

"Oh, no, dear, don't eat it now. That's not the way you do with tricks or treats. You wait till you get out on the sidewalk and then you go ahead and gobble it up. Just put it in your bag for now, sweetie."

Betty was not all that pleased with the idea of putting off eating her gum drop, but she did as Miss Marble asked and plopped it into her bag and quickly followed it with other items such as licorice cats and apples dipped in caramel and pecans lumped together with some lovely-looking brown stuff and soon all the other children, myself very much included, were doing the same, filling our bags and boxes industriously, giving the task of clearing the table as rapidly as possible our entire attention.

Soon, amazingly soon, we had done it. True, there was the occasional peanut, now and then a largish crumb survived, but by and large, the job was done. What was left was fit only for rats and roaches, I thought, and then was puzzled by the thought. Where had such an unpleasant idea come from?

How our bags bulged! How they strained to hold what we had stuffed into them! How wonderfully heavy they were to hold!

* * * * *

Miss Marble was at the door, now, holding it open and smiling at us.

"You must come back next year, sweeties, and I will give you more of the same."

We trooped out, some of us giving the table one last glance just to make sure, and then we headed down the path, Miss Marble waving us goodbye. The long, dead grass at the sides of the path brushed stiffly against our bags making strange hissing sounds. I felt as cold as if I had been standing in the chill night air all along, and not comforted by the cozy warmth inside Miss Marble's house. The moon was higher, now, and seemed, I didn't know how or why, to be mocking us.

I heard Mary Taylor scolding her little sister: "She said not to eat any till we got to the sidewalk!"

"I don't care. I want some!"

The wind had gotten stronger and I could hear the stiff tree branches growl high over our heads. The fence seemed far away and I wondered why it was taking us so long to get to it. I looked back at the house and my mouth went dry when I saw that it was

grey and old and dark, once more, and that the only light from its windows were reflections of the pale moon.

Suddenly little Betty Taylor began to cry, first in small, choking sobs, and then in loud wails. George Watson said: "What's wrong?" and then there was a pause, and then George cursed and threw Betty's bag over the lawn toward the house and his own box after it. They landed with a queer rustling slither that made the small hairs on the back of my neck stand up. I let go of my my own bag and it flopped, bulging, into the grass by my feet. It looked like a huge, pale toad with a gaping, grinning mouth.

One by one the others rid themselves of what they carried. Some of the younger ones, whimpering, would not let go, but the older children gently separated them from the things they clutched.

I opened the gate and held it while the rest filed out onto the sidewalk. I followed them and closed the gate firmly. We stood and looked into the darkness beyond the fence. Here and there one of our abandoned boxes or bags seemed to glimmer faintly, some of them moved, I'll swear it, though others claimed it was just an illusion produced by the waving grass. All of us heard the high, thin laughter of the witch.

TODAY'S WITCH

By DALE C. DONALDSON

Illustrated by Stephen E. Fabian

PAULA SWORE SOFTLY as she rose from the tiled floor. The explosion had been expected, but it was to have been a small 'poof,' not a thunderous blast. It had not been meant to knock her off her feet. A witch should have better control over her alchemy. Probably the last shipment of orris root wasn't the pure stuff, but this was the penalty one had to pay for the convenience of mail order ingredients.

She coughed as she vigorously flailed away at the dense yellow smoke. Rubbing her smooth bare arms she looked reflectively at the wall switch for the ceiling exhaust fan. No, she had better not leave the three protective circles she had so carefully drawn with her witch's knife on the floor of her basement apartment. Circles measured by the knots of her exorcised girdle, and held firmly in spell by the prescribed flickering candles in their special candleholders. One doesn't the circle when calling up a Demon. And this was the Calling of Rosier of the Second Hierarchy, Prince of Love.

Waiting for the haze to clear so that she could get back to her thurible, Paula reflected on her very intensive training of the past months. She had joined the Coven for a single purpose only. To get her man.

Paula wanted James Blakemore. But low-cut blouses, mini-skirts, even micro-skirts, all revealing very much of a lovely Paula, apparently had no effect. James had eyes only for Sue. And Sue had not one bit more to offer.

Except the magic. The magic of a Coven. Eleven other serious minds concentrating on one single thought. To help another member of the Coven. Powerful magic indeed.

There. The smoke had cleared to a point where she could complete the calling. One more oil, two herbs. A complex pattern with the *Athame*, the witch's knife, during the final part of the chant, and Rosier should be there. It was a wonder the blast hadn't blown the damned thurible off the trivet. She stooped, squinting to check the protective seals, and to see if all the candles were still alight.

And dropped the *Athame*. Over the top of one of the sputtering candles she saw him. Siting in her overstuffed chair by the fireplace.

"But——"

He rose. "Need I introduce myself?"

Frantically she tried to cover her nudity with only two hands. He regarded her with interest.

"But... I haven't... I didn't... the Calling isn't completed!" she wailed.

"Yes. I am here." He approached, but stopped outside the protective circles.

She looked at him carefully, and ceased the flutter of her hands. She stood upright, naked and proud. "You certainly don't look like a demon. You look like a man."

He smiled. "You desire horns?" He grimaced slightly, and two red, curved protuberances appeared



on his forehead. Another wince, and a crimson fluked tail crept from under his jacket. "I will provide bat wings if you like."

Satisfied, she waved a silent protest. "What do I do now?"

"You called."

"Yes. I want Sue Havner out of my life. I want to be wanted by James Blakemore. What is your price?"

Again he smiled. I require nothing other than you serve me.

"How...do I serve?"

An immaculate black shoe touched the edge of the outer circle. "There are certain incantations—disguised—in your witch's book. Will you break the circle so I may show you?" The horns and tail disappeared with a soft plop. The handsome face was beaming. "Come now, Pretty Paula. You aren't afraid of me? You must know that I am one of the more decent demons."

Paula moved to the inner circle. His attraction was magnetic. "Just brush out a section with your pretty foot," he said. "All three circles. And snuff the candles. Then I can show you the section of your book that tells how you are able to serve me."

One bare foot extruded through the circumference and that foot became immediately cold. She gasped and, startled, looked quickly into his eyes. To catch a fleeting glimpse of malevolence beyond description. Then the expression was masked.

"Pretty Paula...?"

Shivering, she retreated to the center of her circles. "No! You tried to trick me!"

"Open the circle!" he demanded. "Or I'll tear it apart!"

Mutely she shook her head.

And abruptly he was not there. Instead there was a screaming vortex of frigid air, a maelstrom of cold bleakness, whirring violently around her circles.

Terrified, she huddled near her thurible as the whipping cold increased in volume and intensity. She shuddered as she watched the furnishings of her apartment go flying around the crashing whirlpool of cold. She closed her eyes and put her hands over her ears.

Her warlock teacher had been wise and experienced. Numbly, she followed his instructions.

Three of her protective packets she kissed; then, bracing herself against the deadly pulling pressure, she walked out of two of the circles and approached the burning candle to the north. The monstrous wind howled with victory as she left her protection.

She forced her trembling hand to light the packets, one by one, from the candleflame, and then quickly muttering the remembered words, she threw the prepared talismans out into the keening violence.

Noise and cold winked into nothingness. He sat in the chair, watching. She staggered back to her center, sobbing in relief.

"So. You can't be tricked," he observed. "You will make a most effective servitor."

With emotional exhaustion, Paula gazed at him. Now she knew she could cope. She thought back to the reason for the Calling.

When Paula had learned that Sue Havner had access to witchcraft through the Coven, she wasted no time. She turned off, as far as James was concerned, biding her time. She made fast friends with Sue, and took advantage of the Coven vacancy as soon as she could woo Sue into sponsorship.

Once a member, Paula approached the Coven Leader directly and privately. She told him that she was not content to be just a part of the group. He was to teach her to be a fully qualified witch. He chuckled and named the price. Her body. She paid.

He was an accomplished warlock and she an intelligent pupil. In spite of Sue's protest of broken friendship, every moment of Paula's free time was given to learning. Until at last he told her that he could teach her no more. She had the rudiments and techniques, and all that was left was practice, practice, practice.

Now. She was ready to dispose of Sue and win James.

She telephoned Sue and, after wading through the many evasive answers as to why she had so abused their friendship in past months, got Sue to agree to come to the apartment for a reconciliation. When Sue arrived, Paula had smiled grimly at her innocence. After the flush of hugs and kisses and cooings, Paula indicated Sue take the chair. The death chair. Sweet Sue made no objections.

Then in front of a wide-eyed Sue, Paula quickly stripped to the buff. She ignited her charcoal filled thurible with a charge from her wand, and dropped prepared runes on the burning incense. "Forgive me, Sue," she murmured with closed eyes and, whirling, snapped the wand and uttered the dreadful words.

There was no crackle of incalculable energy. No bolt had flashed. Paula opened her eyes.

* * * * *

Sue grinned impishly.

Furious, Paula turned her back and reflected. Where had she gone wrong? Every step rehearsed, over and over and over. Damn it, the thing had to work! Unless...

She looked at Sue over her shoulder. Gracefully, Sue rose to her feet, and with one unzipping motion was also nude other than a braided girdle and a necklace seal. "Yes," she answered Paula's unspoken question. "I, too. A witch. Also trained by our dear Coven Leader. And I paid the same price."

"Damn!"

Sue's peal of laughter was joyous. "And don't forget, Love, I'm older at this game than thee."

But while Sue may have been a better witch, Paula had a drive that would not be denied. Back she went to the Coven Leader and secured a Warlock's Oath of Secrecy. And the technique of calling up the Demon.

Sue might be more accomplished at witchcraft, and have the combined minds of the Coven behind her, but their was one thing she **didn't** have. The help of the Boss himself. Few witches would take the risk of conducting the Call. Too many things could go wrong. And there was no return.

Now Paula cautiously regarded the Demon. He spoke to her briskly. "You will serve me the rest of this life and will do my bidding without question. In return, James Blakemore will want you. Sue Havner will receive a final disposition. Is it agreed?"

She nodded slowly. It seemed too easy.

"Then make the exchange," he demanded.

Paula hesitated, then with quiet determination slid the specially prepared vial of her body fluids across the floor to him. As it crossed the outer circle it disappeared, and in its place lay a like bottle containing a murky liquid. "Drink this," he said, "and it is done."

"Yes. When you are gone."

"So be it." He whisked out.

Grimly, she went through the procedure of dismissal, fully aware that he would **not** be gone until the complex banishment exorcisms were completed. He would be waiting for a mistake.

At last she was properly finished and was able to leave the circles. She quickly swallowed the substance of his vial. She had expected nausea, but instead it was strangely exhilarating.

The battered furniture was back in place but she was still nude when the door crashed open and a wild-eyed James Blakemore stood swaying on the threshold. She had no time to even find a robe. He attacked her. No love. No romance. Only lust... simple rape. When he was done he left without a word, dropping a folded bit of paper beside her ravaged body. It read:

To Pretty Paula, Today's Witch,

Did you really believe you could win? James and I were married today, which disposes of me nicely. Oh, he wants you all right, and I'm kind enough to give permission.

Dear Heart, I called up Rosier when I first found why you were becoming a witch. With His help and advice I was able to tamper with the orris root. Didn't you notice?

You didn't get Rosier, My Sweet. Rosier is the Demon of Love and Romance. Your alchemy (with my help) brought you Asmodeus, Demon of Lechery and Lust. He is in direct charge of incubi and succubi. When you drank of Him you became one. Yes, Dear. A succubus. So my James will want you all the time. But will you have time for him with the countless males you will service at the command of Asmodeus?

Do try to think of us occasionally.

Sue

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TOMORROW'S WITCH

By CARLETON GRINDLE

Illustrated by Stephen E. Fabian

"TOMORROW?" mused the witch. "We know so little about tomorrow."

She was beautiful with the beauty of youth. Her features were as smooth and aristocratic as a Greek statue's; her black hair long and lustrous, elaborately coiffed in such a way as to suggest the most casual styling. Her body, encased in the bright green of her jumpsuit, was athletic and supple, her bare arms and feet tanned perfectly. She might be taken for an actress or model or the pampered wife of an aging and wealthy industrialist—anything but a witch.

She leaned back, rubbing her shoulders catlike against the lounge in which she reclined. Beneath her dark glasses, full lashes fell across her eyes. The sun beat down upon her and she enjoyed its comfort for languid moment.

"Tomorrow, like yesterday, is illusion," her sultry voice said. "Oh, I know. All is illusion. But time is illusion beyond illusion. Richard, I know about these things. I've lived—"

Richard laughed. "Oh yes, you are so old. One can tell it by looking at you. The wrinkles, the dewlap at your throat, those crow's feet at your eyes..."

Her smile deepened.

"But I am as old as I say. I've seen far more years than you. And each yesterday was once—"

"Was once tomorrow," he interrupted her. "Think of it—a woman who admits her age."

"I still have my youth. I admit only to years."

"And do you maintain this youth through sinister rituals performed at midnight?"

"How I maintain my youth is my own business." She turned over on her stomach.

"My request is simple," Richard said. "I want you to show me the future."

"A puerile request."

"I don't think so. You've known me too long to doubt me. When I say I want something—"

"You usually get it. You're a spoiled child. You really should find a job."

"I don't want a job. I can do nicely on what money I have. What I want is more. A bit of the future. A stock market tip. A racing winner, a number at roulette. A headline. Something I can use to make money—more money than I need. Anything from the future might do that."

"There's nothing I can do for you. You chose a poor time to visit, anyway. I have serious business to attend to. I don't think you'd enjoy witnessing it."

"Ah, witchcraft. At least you don't deny being a witch."

She turned over, sat up. "I must ask you to go. The matter is finished and I have more important things to do. A gypsy can read your fortune for you."

"I don't want my fortune read. I want a specific, useful fact. What it is doesn't matter."

With a show of great patience, she said, "I can tell only one item of the future for any man. It won't be a stock market tip, likely."

"It doesn't have to be. I'm a clever fellow. I'll find a way to make use of it."

"Really—" She said it as if she were in some pain.

"I've given this some thought—and a great deal of research. I've learned that you are the only witch in the world who might be able to accurately forecast the future for me. You have a fine reputation among your... I almost said peers, but then none of the others are quite that good, are they?"

Her face moved slightly and the aristocratic perfection of her expression gave way to something suggestive of discomfort.

"Is something wrong?" he asked.

"What time is it?"

"Almost four o'clock."

"You really must go. What I have to do is urgent."

"We haven't finished our talk." He was suddenly angry.

"Another time. You've stayed too long. You must go."

Not without something of the future to take with me—Amanda."

Through the green lenses of her glasses, he saw her eyes widen, almost bulge, with surprise.

"That's not the name you know me by—"

"But it's your name. Your real name. It had better be, the price I paid to learn it. You see, I've invested quite a bit into this."

"More than you can ever recover."

"Money or power—whatever the future holds is worth it."

"Richard—don't."



"I command you in your true name, Amanda, and you cannot disobey me."

"Please some other day. There isn't time now. It's almost four."

"And what happens at four?"

"There's something I have to do."

"It can wait."

"It can't—"

"I have the power of your true name. You can feel that power because I've performed certain rites while chanting your name. Amanda, you must do as I order."

"Richard . . . Her voice grated, as if she were in pain. Richard came to his feet.

"Your needs are less important than mine. Yours will wait, not mine!"

He grasped her shoulders, brought her to her feet. He took the dark glasses from her face, threw them aside. There was real agony in her eyes.

A smile quirked his lips. "I did not realize my power over you would be so complete. Perhaps I'll have things for you to do after you give me the future."

"You still don't understand. Whatever I see for you must be. It'll no longer be illusion once it's revealed, but total and absolute reality."

"The greater my assurance of wealth and power."

"If I see wealth and power."

"You'd better. Now don't talk any more," he said. He was marvelling at the look of obvious pain on her face. "Just lead me to where you must perform whatever ritual is involved."

"Very well," she said. She turned and led him away from the house and the patio, down a line of narrow stone steps leading to the beach. They crossed the sand to the rocks at one end of the beach. The rocks were smoothed with the washing of countless tides and Amanda moved over them, slowly, cautiously, and Richard followed just as cautiously. She led him to a small cave opening in the rocks and into a large chamber well back from the sea.

It was bare. But there were candles and she lit them, revealing at the far end, a wooden cabinet and, tethered near it, a goat. The floor and walls of the chamber were solid stone.

"You can change your mind," she said. She was speaking with effort.

"Amanda, Amanda, Amanda," he repeated and she winced. In the flickering light, far brighter than any other candle light he had ever seen, he saw her face and realized it was not his power over her that caused her pain.

"You're aging," he said.

"That's the rite I must perform. To keep myself young. I don't have much time and you'll still have control when I'm finished. Please go and let me do what I have to do."

"So that's the purpose of the goat, is it? Sorry, Amanda, but I come first."

With effort, Amanda turned away. A small design was painted on one wall. She knelt before it and stared at it for a long moment, chanting in a low tone. Richard didn't catch the words.

After a moment she turned from the design. "The future is inexorable. You cannot change it. Neither can I. There is no guilt where there is only fate."

"Is that part of the ritual? I won't be talked out of it."

"It's too late to turn from what must be."

She went to the cabinet and from a small drawer took chalk. On the rock floor she drew a pentagram, surrounded by strange emblems. Then, touching the first, she drew a smaller pentagram. As he watched her draw he saw her hands growing gaunt.

She stood in the smaller pentagram. "You stand in the other," she said. Her face, minutes ago the face of a girl of twenty, was now the face of a woman of forty. Grey streaked her hair.

"I still control you," he said, moving into the pentagram.

"But a stronger force controls me now—tomorrow controls me. Controls us both." She took a long tapering candle in each hand. The wicks burst suddenly into brilliant, sputtering flame. She moved the candles in the air before her.

She was no longer old.

Richard saw the transformation with complete astonishment. She was again the young and beautiful girl she had been. "You're young again," he said.

"I saw your future in the painted mirror on the wall," she said. "And seeing it binds me to my part in it—as you are bound to yours."

He still didn't understand. He didn't understand until she placed the candles at certain positions on two points of the pentagram—and something came for him instead of the goat it had been promised.

* * * * *

A WITCH FOR ALL SEASONS

By GANS T. FIELD

Illustrated by Stephen E. Fabian

UP THAT LONELY PATH he had found and followed in the snowy night, suddenly it was misty warm. Thickets showed green under the struggling light of a full moon. Did a hot spring flow here? He looked down at a stone, like an ancient marker for a grave.

"I was waiting for you," sang a soft voice. From the shadows a woman moved toward him, tall, proudly shaped, sheathed in silvery silk. Her hair was a dark storm around her pale face with its big eyes and wide, rich mouth.

"We've met before, Lee Cobbett," she said. "At Judge Pursuivant's birthday party."

"I remember," Lee Cobbett nodded. "Your name is Trine."

"I called you here, and you came."

She was as tall for a woman as he was for a man. Closer she came, to where he stood with booted feet set apart, his corduroy jacket flung open, his square, seamed face lifted to meet her gaze.

Surely she wore nothing under the silk. Her full breasts moved slowly, like bells. Her hips curved, her full-fashioned thighs were like columns. It would be a noble body, Cobbett decided, if she did not flaunt it so smugly.

"And I've heard that you practice black magic," he said. "I'm actively concerned with such things."

"You're actively concerned against such things," she

corrected, smiling with small, pointed teeth. "Too meddlesomely concerned."

"I devote myself to the study of evil and its diminishment," said Cobbett. Rather thanklessly for the most part. Many people don't even believe in witches, how they gather in covens, how they work to foul life and damage it."

"What is evil?" she asked. "Who are you to decide? What if I gave you a work worthy of your energies and talents, and much more to your profit?"

"What do you want of me, Trine?" he asked pleasantly.

"I want you." She had moved so close that her splendid body was almost against his. "All of you, for mine. And you are mine, now. I chose the proper season."

"But you chose winter," he said. "Spring has Beltane Tide. For a midsummer witches' holiday, there's St. John's Eve. Another is Hallowe'en, in autumn. Informed people take their precautions at those times, but winter is full of safe, holy days. We tell winter's tales of ghosts and demons, because we feel safe."

"You're off guard by winter." Her chill fingers touched his hand. "You don't look fou us then."

"Us, you say. This isn't your idea alone. You're here with company."

For he had a strong sense of lurking listeners. Amid



branches overhead, a stir as of wings without feathers. Deep among leafy bushes, a stealthy rustle as of a heavy body, or more than one. More distantly, twin crumbs of light gleamed above a log. He wondered if they were eyes.

"You want me, you say," he elaborated. "Isn't it your friends who want you to have me? If I am to be yours, I'll be theirs."

"No, she said. "They'll be yours. You can rule the coven."

"Flattering," he said, and bowed. "But I doubt if the other members of the coven are a tenth as lovely as you."

"Lovely," she repeated. "Am I lovely? I will love you. You never dreamed of such love. And I'll help you, make you great. See."

Trine turned toward the stone that looked like a grave marker and pushed it over with her foot. She thrust her hand into the hole and tugged. Something rose in her grasp, a skull with empty holes for eyes and a grin of teeth and weedy hair twisted in her fingers. Cobbett heard the snap of the parting neckbone. Straightening, Trine held the skull up like a lantern.

"I'll bring it to life. The dead know everything. Ask a question, this one will answer you truthfully."

"Two or three times I've seen dead men come to life," said Cobbett. "Never with any real enjoyment."

She threw the skull down. Again she reached into the hole, and fetched out a dark book that seemed to be bound in hairy skin.

"Let me tell you about this volume," she said.

said, not taking it. "A Grand Albert can't be burnt or drowned in the sea. To get rid of it, you must bury it in a grave, with highly elaborate funeral rights. I'd rather not look into it. I don't need that sort of knowledge."

She, dropped it back into the hole. Stooping to a new place, she raked her long fingers in loose earth, then rose and turned to him again, holding out something.

"Money, then?" she asked. "It usually is, in these transactions."

Into his palm she trickled heavy coins.

"Gold," he said, peering in the moonlight. "Ancient coins. Probably each is worth many times its gold weight to collectors."

"And thousands more are waiting for you," she told him. "Waiting for you to kneel down and scoop them out. Because they're yours, and I'm yours and you're mine."

"I didn't come here tonight to kneel down."

"You'll kneel if I say so." Her voice turned sharp, and her pointed teeth showed, not in a smile this time. "I called you, and you came, and you'll do as I say. The season was ripe for that." She came close again. "Now, kiss me."

That was an order. Her face floated near, her full lips trembled apart. But Cobbett did not kiss her.

"What season was right?" he asked.

"This season, the time of the stars that compel you. Oh, I found out your birthday—mid-January. You were born under Capricornus."

"The Goat," he said. "An animal much employed in witchcraft. The symbol of your Grand Master. Worshipped as Baphomet."

"And before Baphomet, worshipped as Pan," she added. "Io, Pan!"

"Before Pan, at the very beginnings of Israel, a goat was loaded down with the sins of twelve tribes and driven out into the desert with them. The scapegoat."

"Loaded down with the wisdom of those things, the power of those things," she said. "Made strong and mighty with them. Your stars compel you. You were born under the rule of the Goat, and the Goat is ruled to do what I say here."

"Indeed?"

"The Goat made summer in this grove, for us to meet here. The Goat brought the golden treasure. The Goat carried my voice to you, and made you obey me. You can't stir hand or foot without my leave." Her long hands crept up his arms to his shoulders. "Kiss me, I say."

"With all your friends looking on?"

"For the third time, Kiss me."

"The third time isn't the charm," said Lee Cobbett.

He took a long stride, out of her clasp and away, and he laughed.

"You didn't call me here," he said. "One of a number of persons you trust told me all about your hopes and where you planned to bring them about. It happens that once I so frightened him that ever since he's told me anything he thinks I would be grateful to know."

I came here just to find out how you thought you would manage."

"That's a lie!" she snarled. "The Goat—Capricornus——"

"Your research on me was incomplete, Trine. I wasn't born under Capricornus."

"You were born in mid-January!"

"Yes, but far, far down in Patagonia, on my grandfather's estate. About fifty degrees below the Equator. We don't see the signs of the northern Zodiac there."

He jingled the coins, and threw them on the ground at her feet.

"Don't call me again," he said. "I won't call you, either."

"You don't love me, you hate me," she stammered. "No, Trine. Just now I pity you. Because you have failed tonight. And your friends have no use for failures."

He turned on his heel and walked away.

Something like laughter whispered behind him. As he cleared the thickets and came under snow falling in the open, the laughter rose, high and fierce. And louder than that laughter, Trine shrieked in pain and terror, as though talons had suddenly come upon that beautiful, tender body of hers.

Cobbett shuddered. He turned up the collar of his jacket against the broad, wet flakes and tramped away into the night.

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YUGGOTH COMES TO PROVIDENCE

By L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

On Yuggoth, Lovecraft said, gigantic, blind,
Slab-sided, cyclopean buildings crowd the grim
Abyssal black canals wherein there wind
Dark waters, filling channels to the brim,
Potentous, oily, sullen, and confined
Amid the stygian gloom.

Where once existed H.P.L.'s abode,
On College Street, there looms a boxy mass,
Immense and gray. The house away was towed
To face the Christian Science Church. Alas!
The news, I'm sure, would make the man explode
Inside his unmarked tomb.

Elsewhere about the Brownian campus rise
Straight-lined, slab-sided, cyclopean lairs,
Which every graceful Georgian curve despise;
But joined by airy bridges, spiral stairs,
In geometric forms of alien guise,
These homes designed for whom?

These buildings' names sound harmless to the ear—
The Graduate Center or the Wilson Labs—
But I know better. When our lords appear
From Yuggoth, giant tweezer-footed crabs,
They'll seek their homes, and all in vain we'll fear
Our predetermined doom.

L. Sprague de Camp
5/14/72



The Archangeli Syndrome

by Deane Dickensheet

Illustration by Steve Fritz

Deals with the Devil can be tricky—for both parties.

A British crossword, even for a rabid Anglophile, is no small task, so I was no doubt whistling softly in the nearly-empty reading room of the Anacreon. My breach of form was almost overlooked, due to one of London's more brilliant autumn afternoons but not entirely.

"Are you, Sir, a musicologist?" a disembodied voice close by asked softly, "Or perhaps with J Department?"

Accepting these questions as the gentlest of reprimands, I apologized, and explained that I was a visiting English Literature instructor who had obtained a guest membership through a colleague at London University.

The voice materialized from an adjacent wing-chair in the shape of a member whose bearing and florid face indicated that he was, in all probability, a retired general officer. For a brief moment he stared at me intently, then relaxed. "Ah, I had forgotten that it had reached America, but, of course, you are from California. One of your avocations is, I assume, Baroque music?"

"Hardly an avocation," I replied, "but I do have a rather

extensive collection of recordings. Bach and Buxtehude, principally, and the vocal works of Orlando de Lasso."

"Nothing by Archangeli, of course?"

"No, nothing . . . But I have heard the name," I said.

"You would have, by now, even in America. But a few years ago he had been unknown for 300 years. And I gravely fear that I . . . but then I bore you."

Even such an obvious hook is difficult to resist, and the erudite puns and anagrams of *The Times* had quite defeated me in any case, so . . . "Certainly not," I said. "I should be most interested, General. . ."

"Brigadier, actually; Brillings, Winthrop Brillings, retired fifteen years now. But you could not have heard of me, not after. . ." He stopped, looked at his watch, and signalled to a waiter. "I normally have a whiskey and a cigar at this hour," he said. "If you would join me it may have the same salubrious effect upon your role as listener as it will upon mine as narrator."

The scotch and the cigar were both excellent, in the

tradition of the Anacreon. Brigadier Brillings sent a fragrant haze rising toward the Georgian ceiling, and his eyes fixed upon a far-distant scene as he began.

It was in early January of 1943 (he said); at the beginning of the planning for the invasion of Italy. I was as a Major, assigned to head a section of Royal Army Intelligence known as J Department (I violate, I am sure, no security; I am certain it exists no longer). Our main role in the invasion plan was the infiltration of agents who were to contact the smaller Italian resistance groups, and to prepare them for the arrival of our troops.

The first agent whom we trained was one Pietro Cippola, a Cockney of Sicilian parentage whose fluent but curiously-accented Italian had been meticulously restructured by an Oxford don of Yorkshire parentage and Roman birth. His training was rigorous, and we tested him carefully, even to the point of allowing him to serve three weeks in a military prison with over fifty Italian officers and men, none of whom doubted his origin or politics. He was even reported by an informer for rebellious Fascist preachments.

After further training with aircraft and parachutes, he was scheduled to be dropped over Sicily in a week's time. Only then were arrangements made for him to contact the resistance. His password was suggested by the department cryptologist, a hobbyist whose peace-time occupation had been as a professor of the History of Music in one of the Midlands universities. Arguing that a musical, rather than a verbal, phrase would be less damaging if inadvertently overheard by the enemy, he suggested, purely from the standpoint of obscurity, and therefore singularity, one of the *gigues* of Guido Salvatori Archangeli, an almost unknown Ligurian composer.

Archangeli took his own life in his home village in 1637, at the age of 28, after a fire had prevented his first public concert. He left behind over 300 compositions, none of which had ever been publicly played. He held his place in musical literature solely on the basis of a legend which averred that he had sold his soul in return for a promise that his work, when performed, would be world-famous. Although it was a common example of the Satanic-pact tale, it had a particular interest to budding composers.

Our cryptologist produced a recorder (they were far from common then) and, referring to a page in a largish book, played a few short bars. I remember dismissing them at the time as trivial tweedle-deedle, but simple to hum or whistle, and quite simple to remember. Cippola picked the melody up at once, and so did the rest of the staff. After it was arranged to relay the tune to the Italian resistance, a rule was made prohibiting the whistling of it, for security reasons; this proved difficult to enforce since, subconsciously at least, it was literally on everyone's lips.

At the proper time, Cippola was dropped over Sicily—and vanished. Nothing was to be heard of him but, one week later, both the broadcasts of Lord Haw-Haw and Axis Sally included, without comment, the Archangeli *gigue*. The Allied Command interpreted this as a quiet mocking of our infiltration attempt and assigned a second study—to another group. Our department was assigned to design security precautions for Prisoner-of-War camps in Northumberland. A

few of us rose slowly in rank, but without distinction; our careers were in ruins.

The matter was not to end there. The Sicilian invasion, when it came, was to find the *gigue* the unofficial song of both the invading and defending armies; a veritable Italian *Lili Marlene*.

Some years later, while serving as a liaison officer to a very minor conference, I finally found Pietro Cippola. He was conducting a fairly well-known chamber orchestra in Rome, and was calling himself Guido Pietro Archangeli, and claiming to be a descendant of the composer (who had died, in reality, without issue.) He had uncovered the bulk of Archangeli's compositions in a Ligurian monastery, and had created arrangements for a variety of groups, ranging from trio to full orchestra. He seemed firmly convinced that he was a native-born Ligurian, and had no recollection either of me or of any of his life as Pietro Cippola. There was no adequate reason for me to challenge his conviction.

The works of Archangeli became instrumental in the revival of interest in the Baroque form which occurred simultaneously with the introduction of long-playing records. He became the darling of the scholar and the college student, and his work at least became familiar to an increasing segment of the general public. Lectures were given, treatises written; recorders proliferated like guitars. The *gigue*, of course, led the pack; the massed bands of the Guards played it at a Trooping of the Colours. In America it was used both as the theme-music for a television series and as background for a detergent commercial, a best-selling "rock" group inserted it as a bridge in a song, and only the intervention of the Italian government prevented John Lennon from setting words to it. Reviews of Archangeli works were, if not wholly enthusiastic, lengthy and abundant. Even I found myself in a huge throng at the Albert Hall for an all-Archangeli program conducted by my department's former cryptologist!!

His voice was rising steadily with excitement, so I took the opportunity to order a second pair of whiskies. When they came he drank deeply, and relaxed slightly.

"Now I, Sir, am no more an Occultist than I sense you to be," he resumed, "but I feel that there is but one credible explanation for these events. The moment Pietro Cippola whistled the *gigue*, performed it, if you will, on Italian soil, the Devil was compelled to keep the part of the age-old bargain out of which he had cheated Archangeli. His works *will* become world-famous, and we are all damned to carry out his agreement. The scholars to write, the musicians to play, the conductors to conduct, and you and I, God help us!, to be audience. And Pietro Cippola... God help him most of all!!"

The Brigadier had become so engrossed that he was, by this time, standing beside his chair. He again stared at me momentarily, drained his glass, muttered a distracted "Good day, Sir!" and strode off. As he did so I will swear that he whistled, in dirge tempo but in perfect key, the Archangeli *gigue*.

I did not see Brigadier Brillings again. Since I returned home I have built an almost complete collection of the works of Guido Salvatori Archangeli, culminating in the massive 36-disc stereo series by the Ensembli Baroca di Roma, conducted by Guido Pietro Archangeli. And the Hell of it is that I don't particularly like the style.

E. HOFFMANN PRICE'S



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HUGH RANKIN

WHEN I SAW THE ILLO for my story, "Saladin's Throne Rug," *Weird Tales*, Oct., 1927, I looked forward to meeting the artist, Hugh Rankin. Since I lived only twenty miles from the editorial rooms, then in Chicago, this was soon arranged. I liked Rankin. As a man, he was congenial. As an illustrator, his rating must be determined by someone else. I am biased.

With occasional exceptions, W.T. illos ranged from bungling to unbelievably poor. I have never forgotten the Oriental story in which I mentioned the executioner's two handed sword. The burly headsman, towering gigantically over a pigmy culprit, was sufficiently absurd, since no circus freak featured in the narrative. The jolt came from the sword itself. It had two grips, somewhat like the handles of heavy duty pruning shears!

There was only one blade. He could not get everything wrong.

Farnsworth Wright was embarrassed. When we met, he explained that the "illustrator" had not submitted the picture until the deadline, too late to permit a new drawing. There were other gallant contenders, but the glory of the victor was never endangered...

In 1928, I quit the circle of good friends whose head-

quarters was the office of Farnsworth Wright. My job promotion took me to New Orleans. In 1932, I turned professional. Come 1935, I realized that as a pulpist, I had, in a modest way, "arrived." It was good to sit in the workshop of the crackerbox cottage I'd bought and look out across San Francisco Bay at Mt. Diablo, my friend who has outlived so many human friends these thirty-six years past... It was also good to devote time to getting in touch with comrades I had temporarily lost in the course of the several ferocious years of travelling and scratching gravel and making it.

One of these was Hugh Rankin. Retired, he lived in Los Angeles, 420 miles from my hillside studio. This was the beginning of a series of hand drawn and tinted Xmas cards which I and the Otis Klines and others received each season.

That Hugh would go to such trouble to pen the elves, gnomes, fairies and others of Santa Claus' Assistants revealed the man, and his feeling for his friends. Even for a professional, it took a lot of work to pen those quaint creatures and tint them.

The 1948 card portrays Santa Claus on a roof. He is saying, "I'm a gittin' to" (sic) "old to climb down

SALADIN'S THRONE-RUG

By

E. HOFFMANN

PRICE

chimneys." On the back he pencilled, "Santa Claus can't spell any better than I can. Anyhow, why three ways of spelling 2?"

Another card has the legend, "Merry Xmas from el Pueblo de Nuestra Senora la Reina de los Angeles & el Baldo."

He had been signing off all letters, "Hughie the Bald."

The city's original Spanish name was **el Pueblo de Nuestra Senora la Reina de los Angeles y de Porciunculo**, which is say, in the Queen's English, "The city of Our Lady the Queen of the Angels, and of Porciunculo," which is to say, in the Queen's English, "The city

The pretentious Spanish name had been applied to a puny settlement, not much larger than a **serape**. But real estate promoters, oil and the movies, and fugitives from the middle West, had made the settlement village swell out until it encroached on the limits of its name, and continued, on and on and on...

In those pre-freeway days, Los Angeles was, to quote a **Grand Turismo** fan, "a traffic whore-house." (He pronounced it **hoor-hooss**, somehow making the subject

more obscene than it actually was.) No stranger was ever again quite the same after battling the odds. Most of us contented ourselves with visiting the fringe areas such as Malibu, Topanga, Santa Monica; or, in the San Fernando Valley sector, Tujunga, Sunland, La Crescenta, Pasadena, Monrovia, Glendora...

So, far too much time elapsed before I resolved to see Hugh. Then came the Hitler War. Later, business and other problems hampered me. In 1947, I was poised for take off when a vicious virus made me cancel the plans. Four more years elapsed before I made it.

That forenoon of January 3, 1952, with its brilliance, its fascinating blend of crisp air and solar warmth, was beauty and wonder, and in itself, the joy of living. Then the ultimate; I got to Hugh's front door with practically no trouble. His was the final house of a dead-end street, 446 North Occidental. The stuccoed house was framed by glowing flowers, extravagant color.

Something like twenty-four years had elapsed since our previous meeting. It was plain why he now signed, "Hughie the Bald." In the old days, he had been the

archetype adventure hero whose name Otis Kline and I used in our collab, "Thirsty Blades"—Sidi (Lord) Rankin, as the terrified Arabs of the story called this man of iron. Now, the jowls sagged, the chin line drooped, as did the broad shoulders. Nevertheless, despite the stoop, he loomed up. Full height, six feet, plus. He was not conspicuously overweight, nor truly bulky. It was simply that he did not carry himself as he once had.

Hugh was animated as he had not been in the Chicago days, when he had distinguished himself as a good listener, a splendid drinking companion for the more garrulous. Now, he was eloquent.

Hugh was 73. I stood precisely poised between 53 and 54.

He no longer had a studio. However, the large living room was vivid with artifacts, bits of driftwood and of odd and colorful rock specimens. There were sketches, and small sculptures and carvings, his own work and that of friends. "I'm getting too God damn old to do any more Xmas cards," he said, as we sat there each aware that he'd been wondering when Kline or Wright would be on the phone. Although the deceased comrades did not call, they were with us...

For us to be sitting there was, in an almost literal sense, evocative. There was something bordering on time-travel. A minor magic was at work, something spontaneous yet effective...

Presently Hugh became edgy, too alert. Finally, he said, "Anne—that's my back yard neighbor—she's trying to get me to quit drinking. It's about time for her to be dropping in to see how the animals are getting along. Which includes me."

"Mmm...is she successful, or only a dreamer?"

He continued, "She owns the two trailers in the back yard. Lives in one. The other, that's the animal shelter."

I had noted the trailers in the enormous yard.

Presently Anne drove in. She lost no time crashing the back door. Nice looking youngster, thirty-ish, brunette, with clear, white skin. Too bad she was so near-sighted that from certain angles, the extremely thick lenses of her glasses spoiled the eyes.

Anne' animal shelter was for the injured, ailing,



starving creatures she found. Anne, I concluded, was pretty much all right, and if she interfered with Hugh's drinking, I would for the first time in my life love a meddler.

After she returned to her trailer, Hugh and I went to the kitchen. He dug out a bottle of chain store port or sherry.

"From here, we can see her and I can hide the jug."

Warily, we ate and drank. There was bread, cheese, salami, and a vegetarian ersatz of soy paste flavored to simulate beef. Or chicken. Or something. Hugh explained, "She is trying to sell me the meatless diet. I humor her, up to a point. You don't have to eat any of the stuff."

"Tell Anne you sold me on it, and I went for it, gluttonously. That way she'll forgive you the next time you get drunk."

Food and drink and much reminiscence...

Finally, I got to illustrators: "Hughie, I've often told you and I've written you how much I appreciated your work. What I've never understood was that wretched muck, from the beginning, and on up to your time. If a man was only lousy enough, he could always find work with **Weird Tales**."

"That was Bill Sprenger's doing. One of his ways of cutting costs. Farnsworth could get good fiction at low rates but unless an illustrator was really stinking, he could get work elsewhere."

"That adds up," I admitted. "They did have it tough. My stuff went for half a cent a word till 'The Infidel's Daughter, my second cover, the one you did, paid me \$100. For 12,500 words. That was a raise. And then I was upped to one cent a word. Things were improving around that time, which explains your getting in.'"

I did not ask as to his quitting W.T., whether he had been under-bid, or had wrangled with the management. We of the Chicago clique had shared many happy hours. I did not wish to hear anything, just or unjust, to mar the memories.

Hugh had no car, so I offered to drive downtown to the famous discount market where a shrewd buyer could get amazing values. This gave me a look at the

then colorful market, and gave him a chance to stock up, with no toting problem.

He was offended when I bought several pounds of Swiss cheese, until I convinced him that this was no reflection on his hospitality; that I was going to haul it home, a genuine bargain.

I still picture us, sitting in the large living room, with brilliant sun slanting in, and no traffic sounds to be shouted down, as Hughie sketched the years of his life. I had never heard his story. This was entirely new. This was also one of life's richer moments.

Rankin had never married.

He had always drunk too much, until recently. Much depends upon your definition of "too much." Hugh had never fallen on his face, nor raised his voice, nor ceased smiling. How then could I have got the impression that he drank excessively? Didn't know, till he told me!

Hugh's mother had been a talented sculptor. She had done much work for the Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893. Apparently no one had ever told her that everyone discriminated against women... maybe none of the men wanted to work on that puny project... But, there was no personality sketch. The emphasis was solely on her talent. There was nothing said concerning his childhood home, nor of his father, nor of his school days.

In 1898, Hugh tried to enlist in the Army to get into the Spanish-American War. He was rejected. In 1917, age 38-39, he managed to get into the 50th Infantry for a hand in the Kaiser War.

Although far from affluent, Rankin was better off than many a retired person of today. He owned the house. By brazen effrontery, persistence, and a pleasant approach, he wheedled-browbeat-cajoled, and contrived, without fraud, to diddle several agencies into granting pensions which, all combined, made his declining years comfortable.

During this phase, he said, "Speaking of years—I know I am running out of time." He eyed me, frowned, shook his head. "I don't like it a damn bit. Thinking of death troubles me."

I had heard similar words from others in their early seventies: the same forthright statement, without cringing, whimpering or loss of dignity.

"Hughie, I know what you mean, and how you mean it. But we're all coming back. Reincarnation. In new bodies to take the place of the worn-out coffin bait we got shed of, and high time."

He sighed. "Anne tries to sell me those ideas. Nice, if true. Looks to me like wishful thinking."

Hugh did not have that sustaining faith. He had simply the courage to face things with equanimity—which is much, much better!

"We can't prove, we can not disprove," I said. "Nothing to say that Anne hasn't told you. Don't gulp it as a faith, but don't brush it off as entirely ridiculous."

When Anne returned from work that evening I had a brief chat with her. She and I exchanged cards and letters for a few years. She considered me an ally, since I shared her views on what one could call the "Theosophy-Vedanta-Buddhism" package.

Dismissing death, we got back to life. Hugh was lonely. I recalled his 1950 Xmas card: Santa Claus in blue costume, and saying, "I know I look goofy, but I'll be doggone if I'll be taken for a RED." On the back he had pencilled, "Long time no hear. Might be good idea if you came here and bunked. Lots of radio programs made here, mystery, etc. Me? I'm worried about being drafted for the Korean War, as I have been in my second childhood so long that I am now of draft age.—HR."

Now, a year and a couple of weeks later, Hugh was reiterating the invitation, urgently. Share the house. No rent. From the seventy-plus viewpoint, the fiftyish years and friends and associations had a splendid glow.

I loathed radio. I could not approach that field as I had the pulps, which had always been my meat. Nevertheless, Hugh's proposition gripped the heart. My impending wash-out as a fictioneer made me recall better times, and more than ever, value the friends of those days. But I had to decline.

Following afternoon, I headed north. Mission accomplished.

Noon of December 31, 1955, while visiting Glendora friends, I phoned Hugh. No answer. I resolved to barge in next day, regardless. Wish now that I had. Instead, I buzzed again. Anne answered. Hugh had been whooping it up, a holiday whirl since Xmas Eve. She had seen little of him. She did not say he had been drinking. Maybe he had not.

"I'm a wage slave," I told Anne. "Got to get back to the job. Tell Hugh we'll make it next year."

We didn't.

He died 1957. His years totalled 78. I have no details. I learned of his death from Otis Kline's No. 2 daughter. I had not heard from Anne since that phone talk. I can only hope that he was finding fun, games, and friends to the very end.

To this day, I don't know whether Hugh was simply a detail in Anne's comprehensive benevolence toward all living creatures, or whether her having the run of the house indicated a romance. I am much more concerned with the knowledge that procrastination, aversion to Los Angeles traffic, and bogging down in the hospitalities on the accessible fringes of the Southern Nightmare kept me from seeing Hugh long before we did meet. There were obstacles, yes, genuine and not to be talked away. There remains, however, all that which I can sum up only as "neglect," so that it is very good to recall that final session, and also very sad.

Of that ancient fellowship, there remain now only I, and Robert Spencer Carr...

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JADE PAGODA 23



DEATH GOD'S DOOM

By E. C. TUBB

Illustrated by Jeff Jones

He was promised eternal life if he entered willingly into the essence of the god Phang . . . but Phang was the ruler of Darkness . . .

— one —

THE AIR WAS thick with the stench of sweat, smoke and urine, the whole overlaid with the reek of ancient blood. Malkar rose from a litter of filthy straw and crossed to where thick bars rose from floor to roof. Beyond lay a guard area, deserted now, the stone floor bearing a table loaded with an urn and cups of unglazed clay. A bench stood beside the table. Burning wicks floating in containers of rancid oil provided a dim illumination. By this light he could see a cage fastened high against a wall. It was two feet square and four long. In it a man threshed and whimpered in ceaseless torment.

Hostig woke, roaring, slamming his fist viciously into the straw. A scuttling thing squelched beneath his knuckles. Picking it up he flung it through the bars.

'By the gods!' he swore. 'I was having fair dreams when that demon from hell saw fit to drink my blood. Well, it will drink no more.'

Seyhat stirred, his dark eyes gleaming with ironic amusement. 'Would you who are so large begrudge a meal to a creature so small?'

'Aye, large or small it is all the same. I like not to be eaten.' The big northerner grinned as Seyhat snarled and beat at his leg. 'But you, comrade? Surely you are more generous?'

'Sheol take this stinking place!' Seyhat rose, kicking at the straw, his swarthy face dark with anger. 'Better to have died cleanly in the open than to rot in the dungeons of Dashkit. What say you, Malkar? Is there a weakness in the bars?'

Malkar gripped them with both hands. Like his two companions he had been stripped naked before being thrown into the cell. Muscles bunched beneath the hard



texture of his skin as he tested the bars, knotted ridges rising on shoulders and back. Relaxing he shook his head. 'All are firm.'

'We should be making plans,' Hostig rose, scars white on the hairy barrel of his torso. 'Unless that she-devil wants us to die in her pits they must surely bring food and water. When they open the door we will attack.'

'If they open the door,' corrected Seyhat. 'Most like they will thrust what they have brought through the bars.'

'Then we will catch their arms, draw them close and threaten immediate death unless they open the way.' Hostig prowled the cell like a trapped beast. 'If they kill us what matter? Better to die than to linger in anguish like that poor wight in yonder cage.'

'We can do nothing while locked in this cell,' said Malkar. 'If Ishma had wanted to kill us we would now be dead. Therefore—'

He broke off as a door slammed somewhere to the left. Light shone redly from torches held in the mailed fists of armoured guards. They separated, standing against the far wall. The flame from one of the torches singed the man in the cage; his whimpers rose to rasping screams of agony. Stolidly the man ignored the noise.

Other guards levelled spears at the three men in the cell, the points stabbing between the bars. Hostig cursed as one drew blood from his chest. Grabbing the shaft he jerked. The guard slammed heavily against the bars but retained his grip on the weapon. Other spears lanced forward aimed at the northerner's face. Hostig released his grip and sprang backwards in order to save his eyes.

'Hold!'

A voice barked a command and reluctantly the guards withdrew their spears, moving so as to leave a clear space before the cell. Into it stepped Thagamista, Sorcerer to King Seer, magician to his mercenary army which had perished beyond the walls and before the doors of the temple.

He was as impressive as Malkar had always seen him, still wearing his jewels, his embroidered robe of black and silver, but his lined face showed signs of strain, his green eyes heavy with fatigue.

Gaudy in his feathered headdress surmounted with its disc of featureless jet, Feethan stepped to Thagamista's side. Contemptuously the High Priest of Phang gestured towards the cell.

'Here are your quarters, false sorcerer! See what power Maram has to save you now!' His eyes glittered at the three naked men. 'Move and you die!'

Malkar gripped Hostig by the arm as the door swung open. Regal in his dignity Thagamista stepped through the opening, remained immobile as the door closed behind him, the guards tramping away. Only when the unseen door had slammed did he relax.

'We meet in an evil hour,' he said quietly. 'May the gentle power of Maram save us from further harm.'

'They caught you,' said Malkar. 'But how? Your sorcery—'

'Was not enough to protect me from the evil magic of the accursed priests of an accursed god.' Thagamista leaned tiredly against the wall. 'Their god must be very close for

them to have such power. I had wrapped myself in darkness together with spells of invisibility proof against all normal magic but it was as if I had stood naked in the bright sun of day. Demons scented me out and overcame my sorcery.' He looked at the three men. 'The others?'

'Dead,' said Malkar heavily. 'Some at the gate, a few in the city, the rest before the temple. We three escaped but all the others died. Slain by a terrible cold.'

'The odds were against us,' said Hostig. 'But, by the gods, almost we won! The false queen was within our reach and, with her, we could have made terms for loot and freedom. The only chance we had to keep head on body.' His voice thickened with disgust. 'But she used magic, turning our strength to water even as that black-hearted priest called on his god to slay our companions.'

'Perhaps they have not died in vain,' said Thagamista quietly. 'Great spells demand great payment and Phang is a greedy god. It could be that the score will rise higher than the priests are willing to pay.' He looked to where Malkar had begun to scrape the filthy straw from the wall in order to clear a place for the sorcerer to rest. 'I thank you, Malkar of Meard, but some small power I still retain.'

He stooped, spreading his hands, lips moving silently in an incantation. For a long moment nothing happened and then the straw stirred as if with frenzied life, faint chitterings sounding from within the slimed mess. A haze rose, thickened and, suddenly, the straw was fresh and clean.

Hostig growled deep in his throat. 'Cannot your powers open wide these bars?'

'They are of iron sealed with protective spells of great sorcery.'

Seyhat grunted. 'What good is magic if it cannot win freedom? But at least they didn't strip you as they did us. Perhaps your jewels could bribe a guard?'

Thagamista met his eyes. 'All I wear is a part of my power and all is bound to Maram. Not even the High Priest dared to violate my person. Had he done so we would both have perished. And my jewels will aid us more than tempting the greed of a jailer who would have surely played us false.'

Malkar threw himself down on the straw. Against the wall the captive shrieked in his increased agony. Hostig rubbed the slight wound on his chest, heavy brows drawn in a frown.

'I should have kept that spear. With it, mayhap, I could have ended that poor creature's pain.'

Thagamista stepped to the bars and extended his hands between the iron, turning them so that his gems faced the tormented man. The screams died to a low whimper, the whimper falling in turn into the deep breathing of painless sleep.

'Behold the power of Maram,' intoned the sorcerer. To Malkar he said, 'This is the work of Ishma. I told you of her cruelty.'

Malkar frowned, remembering the woman, her eyes and beauty. 'How could one so lovely be so vile?'

'She must be possessed.' Hostig squatted and rested his back against the wall. 'A black demon has taken over her body and mind, using them as evil instruments of darkness. When we find such in the north we purge them with fire.'

Malkar looked at the sorcerer. 'Could that be so? You knew her when she was young. Was she always as she is now?'

'No,' admitted Thagamista. 'She was not.' He paused, thinking. 'When she was very young she was as sweet as a flower. In those days Maram was worshipped in the temple and the cult of Phang was small and confined to a single place at the edge of the city. The old king died and Prince Seer took his place. Shortly afterwards Ishma revealed her present nature. The cult of Phang grew in power, intrigue sundered the loyalty of the court, rebellion swept the king from his throne and put Ishma in his place. Maram was ousted from the temple and replaced by the vile god Phang.'

'This I know,' said Malkar. 'But did anything else happen at the time? Before the change, I mean, or at the same time?'

Thagamista shook his head. 'I had my duties to Maram and could not be aware of all the small events of the court. Also the king needed my counsel and the use of my powers to benefit the land. Later, when I attempted to search the past, I found it occluded by nighted barriers of sorcerous darkness.'

Seyhat shifted where he sat in the straw. 'And what of the future?'

'Only the gods can be certain of what is to come, but I



will venture a prophecy.' The sorcerer's eyes were glowing emeralds as he looked at the mercenary. 'It concerns you, Malkar. The guards of Ishma will come for you within the space of a double-hundred beatings of your heart.'

— two —

SHE STOOD IN a small chamber all of onyx and ivory, inlaid tables scattered on the furred rug bearing statuettes, vases, things of price. Her hair rose in an ebon cloud of plaited tresses, the thick coils bound with silver. A crimson robe accentuated the milky whiteness of her skin, a silver belt cinching her narrow waist, the soft fabric tight against the voluptuousness of her figure. Silver mesh sandals graced her narrow feet and a single ruby glowed on the index finger of her left hand.

'Your Majesty!' The captain of the guard which had collected Malkar from the dungeon bowed with abject humiliation. 'The prisoner as you ordered.'

The ruby glittered as she lifted her hand. 'Leave us.'

As the officer backed away she stepped closer towards Malkar, her eyes coolly appraising. He had been washed and shaved, his hair made lustrous from the ministrations of a palace barber, dressed in a single garment of watered silk which reached to his ankles. About him hung an odour of perfumed waters.

'You are tense,' said Ishma. Her voice was as sweet as the chiming of bells. 'Wary and wondering what is going to happen to you. In a measure your future depends on yourself. But know this. If you lift your hand against me you will fall in torment.'

Malkar remained silent, watching as she poured wine into two containers of lambent crystal, taking the one she offered.

'So!' She lifted her goblet. 'To Dashkit and to happiness!' Her eyes glinted with amusement as he hesitated to drink. 'You think the wine is drugged? Here, take this I have tasted. Now will you join me in the toast?'

There was a cloying sweetness in the wine and a hint of burning spices. Malkar sipped, curious, letting the liquid ease down his throat. It lit a fire in his stomach, warming him with an increased awareness of the woman's femininity. 'What do you want with me?'

'So you can talk? That is well.' She turned and sat, full lips curved in a smile. 'You are tall and very brave. Feethan says that in you are contained great powers and that I can well believe. You fought like a tiger and yet remained unscathed. The thing attracted me. You can be no ordinary man.'

'I am a mercenary trained in the use of arms. You are generous to flatter my prowess.' Malkar drank more wine and added, 'I thank you for your kindness.'

'Men do not sing of my kindness, Malkar. Neither do they say I am gentle. Their songs say that I am cruel, but in this world what woman can afford to be weak? I rule but I am lonely. In all this land there is none that I dare trust, none that I dare to love.' Her voice fell a little. 'And I am a woman with a woman's need.'

A woman, lovely it was true, but with a hint of something in her eyes which he dared not trust. Yet she played a game in which he could join.

Smiling he said, 'My lady, never have I seen such loveliness as I see now. The gods must have fashioned you with their own hands and blessed what they had made. Surely the sun with all its glory could never warm a man as would the magic of your embrace.'

Her goblet rang as she set it down, a thin, high note of absolute purity. 'Your words please me, Malkar. I would hear more. But first you must pledge me your loyalty.'

'Never could I harm you, my lady.'

She frowned. 'What manner of address is that? I am the Queen of Dashkit. All recognise my majesty.'

Malkar met her eyes. 'There are some who would not agree to that. I follow one who claims to be the true ruler. I have given my oath to King Seer.'

'To serve him until the city has fallen or he is dead,' Ishma gestured impatiently with her ringed hand. 'I know of your stupid oath. Well, it can be ignored. The city did not fall.'

'And the king?'

She rose, storming. 'Sheol take you! Why are men such fools? To place such importance on empty words! Did he bind you with bonds of sorcery?' Without waiting for an answer she beat at a gong. 'Never mind. I will show you the man you claim to be a king. Belike the sight will remind you of the condition in which you stand.'

Guards poured through the door in answer to the summons, fencing Malkar close as they followed the woman down flambeaux-lit corridors of echoing marble, over chiselled blocks of massive stone, down to where the footing was rough and moisture slimed the walls.

A sentry snapped to attention as they approached. A heavy door slammed open with a dull crash of timber. Beyond lay ruby light, the stench of hot metal and the whimpering threnody of a man in an extremity of pain.

Ishma entered, gestured for Malkar to follow.

'There,' she said coldly. 'Behold the man you call a king.'

A parapet ran in a ten-foot circle about the centre of the room, the edge three feet high and rimmed with metal. It enclosed a sunken vat of iron, the bottom of which was twelve feet from the rim.

In it a man stumbled in constant motion.

Malkar leaned on the edge of the pit and snatched his hand from the contact with hot metal. Sickly he stared at the man below. The mail had gone, the surcoat, the costly fabrics. Now he wore rough leather, short on his arms, scanty on his legs. Smoke rose from the soles of the thin sandals on his feet. His bare arm touched the side of the vat and he jerked, the scent of charred flesh rising in the chamber. Beneath the square-cut helmet of his hair the king's face was a mask of agony.

'When I gained the throne he escaped from Dashkit,' said Ishma as she stood watching. 'The false sorcerer Thagamista used his arts to aid him and accompanied him on his journey. They gained support and money from traders and merchants hoping for later profits. With it they hired an army of mercenaries. Of them all only you, he and those in the cell are left. Yet still he is stubborn. The fool is obdurate and will not renounce his claim.'

Malkar said thickly, 'Is this necessary? You sit on the throne. Why demand that he gives you what you already possess?'

'Because it is my pleasure!'

The music had gone, the gentleness, the womanly charm. Now her voice reflected her nature, cold, arrogant, viciously cruel.

Beside the door a guard stirred, grounding the butt of his spear. Malkar straightened and looked around. The other guards pressed back against the wall unwilling to look into the pit. Ishma stood a third of the way around the parapet, gloating. The way between himself and the guard at the door was clear.

He turned, sprang towards the man, snatched at the spear as his bare foot kicked the man in the side. Caught off-balance the guard fell with a clatter of armour. Before he could recover Malkar was back at the edge of the pit, the spear lifted in both hands.

Ishma screamed a warning. 'Guards!'

King Seer lifted his head as he heard the cry, saw the spear, the face beyond it and spread wide his arms.

'Malkar!' he cried, 'I give you my thanks!'

And died instantly as the point sliced into his heart.

For a moment all was noise and confusion, the red glitter of swords in the ruby light, the feral eyes of men determined to kill.

'Hold!' Ishma checked the guards with an imperious gesture. Eyes blazing she looked at Malkar. 'You have dared to rob me of my victim. You! Scum of a mercenary you shall pay for this! Guards! Remove the body and throw this fool in his place!'

'Your majesty!' Malkar fell to one knee, head bowed, arms wide in abject supplication. Seer was dead and now beyond harm. Words could not hurt him but they could save the living. 'If I have displeased you I deserve to suffer as you decree. Yet I slew the man in order to save your beauty.'

'Speak!'

'Often he spoke to me when in camp of how you were the most beautiful of women. In that he spoke less than the truth. But he had reason to wish you ill and had decided on a most direful revenge. A spell of great power was purchased from the black sorcerers of Keel. He would use it as a last resort for to utter it would be to rob himself of life. When used it would blast your beauty beyond redemption so that you would become a thing of horror to all sighted men.' Malkar rose slowly to his feet and looked directly into the eyes of the woman who held his life. 'I saw by his face that he was about to utter the spell. I acted before he could do you harm. The spear reached his heart in the very edge of time.'

Ishma drew a shuddering breath. 'You speak true?'

'Your majesty, how can you doubt?' He looked at her, knowing that he had gained a respite at least, adding to his security as best he could. 'But I would have done the same even had there not been the threat of that terrible curse against your person. My oath,' he explained. 'Before I could give you my loyalty the man had to die.'

'By your hand?'

Malkar shrugged. 'The oath said nothing as to the manner of death, your majesty. The fact that he has met his end is enough.'

She laughed, appreciating the callous cynicism. 'You talk

well, mercenary. Well enough to have saved yourself from my displeasure.' She stepped towards the door as a sickening odour rose from the pit. 'Gods! The place stinks like a pyre! Let us go back to where the air is sweeter.'

A slave brought them wine, served, left with a glance at Malkar from bold eyes. Ishma sat so close that he could smell the scent of her perfume. Reaching out she touched his hand, her slender fingers running over his knuckles, the muscular wrist. Boldly he returned the caress, his own hand stroking the silken texture of her hair. She yielded a little and he moved closer, grunting as she turned, the ring on her finger catching his nose and filling his eyes with water. 'Malkar!' Her voice was sharp. 'What is wrong?'

'The crone.' His throat ached as he forced out the words. 'You were an old woman.'

Her hand lashed at his face. 'You call me that! Know that I am Carcilinarmen, favoured of the gods! I have a sorcery so great that I summoned a being from outer darkness. Together we made a pact. In return for my opening a path I was promised anything I desired. I chose this!' She slapped her hand against her thigh.

'I was born to a hill farmer and lacked the favour of men,' she continued more quietly. 'War came and I was swept away to be sold as a slave. A magician bought me as a household drudge but, unknowing to him, I studied his books and learned many secrets. When he died I became



He blinked, too startled to answer. Where should have sat a beautiful woman, crouched a withered crone. A scrag of white hair clung to a yellowed skull. Toothless jaws gaped in a parody of a smile. The face was a thing of shrivelled skin over prominent bone. In his nostrils was the stench of death.

Savagely he shook his head, clearing his eyes of moisture and, abruptly, the crone had vanished and Ishma sat in her place.

He reared up from the chair. 'By the gods, what black sorcery is this? You—'

Her hand lifted in a mystic gesture and he fell back, unable to move.

free. By magical arts I managed to enter the household of the rulers of Dashkit. The old king used me first as nurse, then as governess to his daughter. Can you imagine the hell in which I lived?'

Ishma rose and stretched, the light from glowing cressets shimmering from the lustrous mane of her hair.

'The chit was fair and favoured of all. I was old and ugly and heeded by none. In despair I deepened my knowledge of sorcerous arts, venturing into realms which would have blasted the mind of a lesser being. In a space between dimensions I met the one known as Phang. It was with it that I made my bargain and we have both kept it to the letter.'

'You gave it priests,' said Malkar painfully. 'A temple and the homage of the city. And what did it give you in return?'

'A body,' she said, glaring her defiance. 'This body. First I had to die and then, when I did, Phang snared my ghost and forced it into this container. The chit struggled and struggles still but to no avail. She watches as I turn her city into a place of blood and pain. And why not? For too long they despised the old governess and she among them. Now I rule and do as I will until this body grows old and I leave to find another host.'

Malkar strained against invisible bonds. 'You are mad. Dabbling with sorcery has turned your brain.'

The woman smiled and beat a gong. To the guard who answered she said, 'Summon men. Inform the High Priest that he is to prepare for an offertory. We have a sacrifice for the great god Phang.'

— three —

SOMEWHERE A MAN was whimpering, 'Oh, god! Oh dear, sweet god! Oh gentle Maram save me from my enemies! Oh merciful—'

'Shut your whining mouth!' The voice was deep, harsh with impatient anger. 'Shut up or I'll give you something to whine about!'

'No! Oh dear god let him not—' The whimper broke off, turned into a scream. 'No!'

There was a sharp hiss. The scream rose, echoing, then died in a falling moan. The deep voice snarled a curse. 'By Phang these followers of Maram are weak. A touch of hot iron and they faint like women. Krishan! Wake him with water and give him the bastinado. I'll find where he has hidden his gold if I have to flay him inch by inch.'

An eager voice rose above the splash of water. 'Master, I heard of a persuasion much used in the land of Vendis. Splinters of wood are thrust deep beneath the fingernails and then set on fire. May I use that means of loosening his tongue?'

Rumbling laughter echoed from the vaulted roof. 'Phang take me for a sacrifice! You show the true spirit, young Krishan. Aye, use what means you will, but kill him not. Learn his secret and I will buy you a new jerkin.' Heavy footsteps thudded on the floor.

Malkar jerked to a sudden deluge of water.

Shaking his head he opened his eyes. The executioner stood before him, wide-legged, his leather jerkin old and blotched with ugly stains. Piggish eyes glared from beneath bristling brows and the naked skin of his scalp shone red in the light of smoking flambeaux. A thick matted beard parted to reveal the cavernous hollow of a mouth.

'So you sleep, my pigeon. Are you so eager to taste the nothingness which awaits?'

Malkar tensed then relaxed. Tied firmly to a wall he could barely move. Beyond the executioner, through an open door, he could see the loom of monstrous implements of torture, the rack, the pulley, the iron horse and maiden, a glowing brazier in which rested rods and shapes of iron. A shadow moved and the unseen victim shrieked in torment.



'Dear God! No! No! My hands!'

Krishan's youthful treble rose, shrill, excited. 'Where is hidden your treasure? Talk and I will grant you ease from anguish. Talk, old man, or—' The thin voice broke into a stream of petulant curses as the shrieking died. 'By the gods! Again he has fainted!'

Matted hair parted as the executioner rumbled his displeasure. 'The lad is too eager. He has yet to learn the art of patience. Secrets are not easily wrung from those who are stubborn. Yet give him a few more years beneath my tutelage and he will wring converse from the very stones.'

'He is an imp of hell!' snapped Malkar. 'Sheol take you both!'

'You speak of a pleasant garden compared to what awaits you in the temple of Phang,' snarled the executioner. 'No torment that I could devise would cause you greater anguish than what is to come.'

He turned as men stamped from the room beyond. An officer wearing the crested helmet and brazen armour of Ishma's personal guard thrust his way to where Malkar stood. Their eyes met as he checked the bonds.

'Had I the choice I would give a year's pay to see your end,' the officer said thickly. 'My brother died beneath your sword. I pray that you suffer an eternity of pain.'

Malkar spat into his face.

The officer reared back, eyes blazing with anger. His

hand lifted, the knuckles slashing against the prisoner's jaw. Again he readied himself to strike.

'Hold!' Feethan, resplendant in his gaudy headdress, the circular plane of jet seeming to absorb the guttering light, stepped from the door. 'Know you not that those selected for sacrifice must not be flawed? Strike again and you join him in the temple.'

The officer blanched. 'My lord! I crave your forgiveness. I—'

'Enough! Release him. The procession awaits!'

Stumbling, lips thinned against the pain of returning circulation, Malkar followed the High Priest as he led the way from the underground chamber. He walked like an automaton, unable to resist the magical compulsion of Feethan's spells, so that naked and unfettered he seemed to be a willing sacrifice.

Lights blazed as they reached the upper levels, the glow of massed torches, the flare of cressets and flambeaux. Dazzled he could see a double line of devotees all wearing gaudy plumes, each with the disc of featureless jet which was the symbol of Phang. In their midst he moved forward as trumpets blared, the echoing notes mingling with the rattle of sistrums, the brazen throb of gongs and cymbals. Drums caught at the senses inducing hysteria with their relentless pounding. Like a brightly coloured, gem-encrusted serpent the procession moved across the great hall towards the inner precincts of the temple.

An enormous chamber opened beyond the soaring valves of a mighty door. The columns were plated with electrum, the vaulted roof studded with agates, chalcedony, cornelians, garnets, lapis lazuli. Incense rose in thick clouds from golden censers filling the air with a heady perfume. Voices rose in a sonorous chant as the procession moved between serried ranks of worshippers. At the far end the marchers split, moving to either side so that Malkar was pressed forward to stand alone before the altar.

He studied it as the High Priest mounted the dais.

A great slab of obsidian polished to a mirror brightness rested on the low platform. Above and beyond it, facing the great hall, reared a featureless disc of ebon darkness fully twenty feet in diameter. It was surrounded by a ring of gilded metal, the bright surface reflecting the dancing flames of the massed illumination. But there was no reflection from the ebon disc. The nighted surface seemed to absorb all light as if it were a sponge.

Feethan faced the disc, made obeisance, turned and flung wide both his arms. A gong throbbed and when the brazen echoes had died away the great hall was silent.

'Oh, great Phang, Destroyer of Worlds, Ruler of Darkness, Giver of Power, Keeper of the Gate, we pay you homage!'

His voice rang out over the assembly and was echoed by a low murmur from the congregation.

'To you, Great Phang, we kneel in humble adoration.'

Again the High Priest called out and Malkar guessed that it was going to be a long service. Standing in an area of isolation he strained at the sorcerous numbness which held him in thrall. Muscles surged beneath his skin but still his body refused to obey his mental commands. Hungrily he looked to where a crested guard stood to one side. If he

could only force life into his body, reach the scabbarded sword and tear it free these worshippers of a vile god would have cause to remember his name.

Again the gong crashed its brazen thunder. Men dressed in temple plumage came forward, gripped Malkar, lifted him to the dais. The High Priest reached out and rested both his hands on the muscular shoulders.

'Come,' he said. 'The god awaits.'

Helplessly Malkar followed the man to the altar and lay obediently on the smooth surface. Broad straps encircled the wrists and ankles of his extended limbs. Feethan looked up at the ebon disc and raised his arms.

'To you, great Phang, we offer this sacrifice. To you this gift of blood. Harken to us when we pray.'

He bowed, stepping backwards to the edge of the dais, turning as he stepped down. Before him the assembled worshippers began to stream from the great chamber, the sound of their sandals a rustling whisper. Guards checked that none lingered behind the columns. It grew dim as the torches were borne away. The great doors at the end of the hall closed with a muted thud.

Alone Malkar waited for what was to come.

The ensorcelled weakness had vanished. Life and vigour ran through his veins and he cursed the irony which had given him strength only after he had been firmly shackled. Craning his head he tried to look around but could only see the vaulted roof, the ebon disc to one side, the edge of the empty hall on the other. Beyond his feet a torch burned low in its holder. Behind his head another guttered with dying light. Thick shadows raced over the gleam of electrum and jewels. Neck muscles cracking he let his head fall back to the smooth surface of the altar.

Animal rage burned through him, a savage anger which bared his teeth and accelerated the pounding of his heart. Was he a mindless beast to wait tamely for slaughter?

Arching his body he strained at his bonds. The wide straps were too strong, his limbs too widely extended for him to make any impression. Relaxing he began to inflate his chest with great inhalations.

The glitter of torchlit gems in the roof caught his eyes, hypnotic in their brilliance, adding to the soporific stench of incense lingering in the air. Closing his eyes, still breathing deeply, he forced himself to relax. An old fakir of Hind had once taught him how to channel his strength and he remembered the secret discipline. Four straps held him and it was impossible to break them all. But one?

He concentrated, collecting his strength, sending the accumulated energy of each muscle into his right wrist. He felt his arm stiffen, strain against the strap, the wide leather biting into his flesh. The pain helped, fuelling his anger, giving birth to a berserker rage which would allow nothing to stand in its way.

The strap broke with a harsh rip of leather.

Malkar swung his right hand over to his left, seeing the purple bruises, the blood seeping from beneath the nails. Grimly he tore at the buckle with his numb fingers. His left hand free he sat upright and released his ankles. Massaging his right wrist he swung from the altar.

And froze.

Something watched him from the ebon disc.

It was a formless swirling, black on blackness, the impression of eyes, of jaws which champed in insect-like ferocity, a thing of mind-numbing horror all the more terrible because of its very vagueness. A creature of slime and delirious nightmare, a vileness spawned in the darkest pits of fevered imagination. From it came probing tentacles, broad-tipped, writhing like crippled worms, suckered and coated with a sticky ooze. They reached the altar, found it empty, lifted with horrible purpose towards where Malkar stood.

Votive offerings stood to either side of the dais, tripods, goblets, things of price. Among them gleamed the hilt of a sword. The pommel was crusted with gems and the blade had been gilded but it was still something with which to cut and stab. Malkar sprang towards it, raised it high as a tentacle clamped around his waist. The edge whined through the air as he chopped down, biting into a rubbery surface, green ichor flowing from the gaping wound. Again he slashed, cursing the dullness of the blade, trying to compensate for lack of keenness by the fury of his blow. The tentacle fell away as two others seized his legs and arm. Struggling furiously he was dragged towards the ebon disc.

From it came a thick slobbering, the gusting sigh of a gelid wind.

Dying light shone from the gilded metal surrounding the disc. Malkar caught at it, feeling the cold smoothness beneath his left hand, gripping with desperate strength as he stabbed the point of his sword at the ebon surface. It was as if he thrust at smoke. The tentacles gripping him tightened and, with an abrupt jerk, tore his grip from the metal.

Darkness closed around him as he was pulled through the disc, an ebon mist of ensorcelled night which pressed against his eyes with clammy fingers. He felt the pressures on arm and legs, the hilt of the sword in his hand, the flexing of his muscles as he slashed blindly all around. A gust of frigid air numbed him with sudden cold. Something rough and spined rasped against his thigh. He chopped, felt resistance, slashed again. The grip of the tentacles eased a little and he writhed still maintaining his attack.

Abruptly he was free, spinning as he fell, the wind droning around him and then rising into a thin keening which faded in turn. Silence joined the darkness as he fell through unimaginable distance. Wings of softness closed around him, carried him to one side, set him down on a surface which felt as if composed of rubble and bristling spines. He tripped, fell, managed to stand upright on a pulsating substance. He fell again and realised that the motion was forcing him in a certain direction. Dropping on all fours he crawled over what seemed to be a warted hillock and felt a peculiar vibration beneath the soles of his naked feet.

He reached out and felt softness, plunging the blade of his sword into something like jelly, twisting the weapon and feeling a gush of wetness slime his hand.

A scream of rage echoed within his skull.

Beneath his feet the surface twitched and again he was falling through endless darkness. The darkness turned into a pearly luminescence, into a sparkling flood of light. Beneath him stretched a landscape of nightmare proportions.

A bowl of sand facing a sky of emerald flame. Trees which reared a thousand feet into the air. Boulders piled as large as a palace. A glittering web into which he fell. A spider as large as a hundred-oared galley. It advanced, eyes like gems, mandibles gnashing in eagerness to suck the juice from its prey.

The sword whined, the dull edge forcing its way through hampering strands, chopping away the snare which held him fast. The blade shone like burnished gold as Malkar raised it high, brought it slashing down with the full strength of arms and shoulders. Chitin yielded beneath its impact, thin ichor gushing from the stumps of severed limbs, welling from the ripped abdomen, the hacked mandibles. Dropping from the web Malkar raced across the sand and stood watching as the spider died.

From above came the sound of tearing cloth.

Chest heaving he stared at the sky. It opened and a claw reached down, gripping him, flung him into space. A grotesque creature hanging from an inflated bladder caught him as he passed, the touch of its tendrils searing like acid. Ignoring the pain Malkar clamped the sword between his teeth, gripped the whip-like strands and began to climb. He saw goggling eyes, a wizened face, the great dome of the bladder above. Gas hissed free as he ripped it open with the point of the sword. Together they fell towards a sea edged with drifting clouds of coloured smoke.

Releasing his hold on the creature Malkar plunged beneath the waves. He surfaced, gasping, suddenly aware of danger. A ripple cut towards him and he dived, seeing wide-gaped jaws and a yellow body arrowing towards him. He swam to one side and thrust as the creature passed. Blood fogged the water from the gashed side as he surfaced again gulping air. The smoke shifted and he saw the shore. A man stood on the edge watching as Malkar crawled from the sea.

'You'll never be able to survive,' he said. 'Why do you bother to struggle against forces so powerful?'

Malkar shook water from his hair, not answering, narrowing his eyes as he looked at the stranger. He was an old man, white of hair and beard, wearing a simple robe of dull brown fabric tied with a cord. His feet were bare. He shook his head at Malkar's silence.

'Phang is too powerful for you to resist. Why not let yourself be assimilated into the essence of his godhood? This struggle is futile. How can you, a mortal man, hope to defeat a god? The concept is ridiculous. Gods cannot be defeated. Throw away that foolish weapon and accept your destiny.'

'It may be true that a god cannot be destroyed,' said Malkar slowly. 'But it is not in my nature to yield myself to destruction.'

'Assimilation is not destruction. Enter willingly into the essence of Phang and you will live forever. You will become a part of the god and be given great power.' The old man held out his hand. 'Now come, give me that sword.'

Malkar slashed at his neck.

Dull though the blade was the force he put into the blow was enough to send the head leaping from the shoulders. It rolled on the ground, eyes still wide. Calmly the old man picked it up and held it in his arms.

'Do not make the mistake of thinking this is a dream,' he said. 'You fight the manifestations of a god. Beware the revenge which awaits!'

Coloured smoke drifted around him and carried him from sight.

Grimly Malkar looked around. He was caught, trapped between dimensions at the mercy of a cruel and malicious being. He could no more destroy Phang than a gnat could destroy a man, but he could irritate him, annoy the creature until it lost patience and spat him out as man would spit a morsel of tough and indigestible food from between his lips.

Abruptly the light changed, the swirling clouds of mist congealing into fearful shapes of vague familiarity, each holding disturbing suggestions of unease. The air opened like a door to reveal crystalline shapes stooped in awkward obeisance before a disc of ebon darkness. The image changed to show tall figures like mobile trees rubbing wooden arms together as a stunted bush shrilled its terror before the hatefully familiar circle of darkness.

Snarling Malkar lifted his sword, feeling the familiar heat of berserker rage.

'If you are a god show your power!' he yelled. 'I, Malkar of Meard, challenge Phang so-called the mighty. In straight combat let it be decided. Best me and I yield. If I win then return me from whence I came. Refuse and the gods will see that your temples echo with the derision of those who now pay you homage!'

If not a gnat then a flea, an irritation, a thing of no real danger which could be disposed of with a slap or the flick of a finger. The slap would destroy. The contemptuous flick?

Gelid wind roared, picked him up, sent him whirling through endless regions of interdimensional space. Malkar saw the blazing fury of suns, the awful majesty of distant stars, heard the mind-twisting sound of creating matter. Visions flashed before his eyes, a room in which a man sat poring over ancient scrolls, an army locked in a desperate encounter, a ruined city. With amazement he recognised it as the city of Dashkit.

The visions blurred even faster. Fire glowed and a smith toiled over a blade. A magician carefully inscribed runes on the gleaming steel. The same blade, worn now, the runes reduced to memories in the steel, rested on a jeweller's bench to be fitted with gems and gilding. The sword he had snatched from the temple and which he still retained.

An ensorcelled blade of unsuspected power the ancient runes holding sufficient magic to have given him protection.

The bite of the flea.

A cell swam into his vision, the three men it contained motionless in the straw. A woman brushed her mane of blue-black hair. A mummy rested in the crevice of some forgotten wall. A thousand images flashed stroboscopically before his eyes and all the time he was falling... falling...

To be spat like a morsel of dirt back through the ebon ring and on to the empty altar.

A thought, as cold as a bitter wind, echoed ringing with malice within the confines of his brain.

'Beware, mortal! I shall return!'

Snarling Malkar rolled from the slab, turned, flung the sword with all the power of his arm into the gaping menace of the ebon disc.

— four —

THERE WAS A moment of utter stillness and then a great wave of naked ferocity came gushing from the nighted circle. Malkar raced down the length of the temple and flung himself against the great valves of the door. They were unlocked and moved easily on greased hinges. Two guards wearing temple plumage stared in shocked incredulity as he burst from the great hall.

One fell immediately, choking from a ruptured larynx as the edge of Malkar's left hand chopped at his throat. With



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his right the mercenary ripped the sword from its scabbard and thrust the steel at the second guard. As the man dropped he raced back along the path the procession had taken.

There were too many turns, too many chambers and passages. Baffled, he slowed, sprang into a side passage at the sound of footsteps, crouched, chest heaving as a party of guards passed almost within touching distance. A door yielded to his pressure and he slipped into a small chamber. A tiny lamp glowed against one wall and the air was heavy with perfume. On a bed a woman stirred, waking from slumber.

Wide-eyed she stared at the tall, naked figure, blood-

stained sword in hand, grey eyes blazing beneath the black mane of his hair.

Before she could scream Malkar was on her, left hand clamped over her mouth, the point of the sword pricking her flesh. 'Where lie the dungeons? Tell me and I will leave you unscathed. Scream and you die!'

She had expected the sword to penetrate her heart. Relief edged her words as he lifted his muffling hand. 'From this chamber turn right. Turn left at the lower passage. The way below lies behind the third door on the right.' Her eyes grew curious. 'Is there ought else you desire?'

'Aye, lady, I must gain your silence.'

The fingers of his hand dug into her throat, found the great arteries which carried blood to the brain, pressed until she slumped unconscious. Like a ghost he flitted from the chamber and found the desired portal. Stairs led downwards and he tensed at the clink of metal. Cautiously he descended, sword poised in his hand. In a room at the foot of the stairs three guards sat rolling dice.

Two strokes and it was over. The guards were unarmored, awkward as they tried to rise from the table. A pockmarked man gulped as he saw the pointed steel aimed at his throat, the split skulls of his companions. He cringed as the blade moved closer.

'The dungeon,' said Malkar. 'Where does it lie?' He saw the movement of the other's eyes as he glanced to where a door pierced the thick wall. 'And the keys? Where are the keys?'

Sweat beaded the scarred face. 'On a nail beyond the portal. Master! I beg you! Spare my life!'

Malkar snarled and slammed the hilt of the sword against the unprotected temple.

Thagamista poured wine from an urn into a cup and spread his hands over the surface, lips moving in an incantation. Intently he peered into the container. Malkar spoke quietly from where he stood at the foot of the stairs.

'Can you decipher the way from this place?'

Frowning, the sorcerer shook his head. 'There are shadows and strange shifting of patterns of darkness. It is as if great sorcery were at odds within itself. Perhaps your battle with Phang is not yet over. Not easily does a god admit defeat. I fear there may be great disturbance in the city and temple.'

Hostig grunted as he stretched in his too-small armour. 'We are dressed as guards. Could we not simply walk from this place while pretending that you are our prisoner?'

'You make it sound too easy,' said Seyhat. 'Are the guards all fools? Is Ishma blind? Can dead men be left lying and no one ask questions? Malkar has performed a miracle in releasing us from that cell and finding us weapons and armour. But is he a sorcerer that he can wing us all to safety with a spell?' He staggered as the floor suddenly shifted beneath their feet. 'By the gods! What was that?'

Hostig grabbed at the wall as the tremor was repeated. 'The Earth god stirs,' he rumbled. 'I have seen the like before. Maram grant that the walls fall not about our ears.'

Again the floor shifted, a deep rumble coming from far



below. On the table cups danced and spilled their contents. Hostig snatched one up and drained it.

'Let us run,' he said. 'In the confusion we could win our way from the city.'

'With gold,' added Seyhat. 'There is plenty in the palace and jewels in the temple. We need not leave empty-handed.'

Thagamista lifted a gemmed hand in a demand for silence. His eyes glowed as he stared into a puddle of spilled wine. Around him unseen forces caused the air to quiver with straining energies.

'It is as I suspected. The false god is wreaking vengeance and none who have served him is safe. The use of sorcery is not to be undertaken without due regard for what it entails. For each spell there is a price which must be paid in full. Forces used must be counterbalanced by other forces in equal measure or the debt accumulates and the unwise practitioner runs the risk of being blasted by his own recoiling powers. The priests of Phang have been too liberal in their use of magic. Now they must pay.'

Malkar remembered the vision he had seen when spinning between dimensions. 'And Ishma? Will she also perish?'

'She cannot escape. From Phang she took great powers and used them as she would. Her evil has doomed her to inevitable destruction.'

'But she is not to blame. A witch has taken possession of her body.'

Thagamista was thoughtful as he listened to what Malkar had learned. 'Carcilinamen,' he mused. 'I remember her. A strange creature who shunned the company of others. The old king retained her by reason of charity and granted her last request to be interred in the manner she specified.'

'Embalmed,' said Malkar. 'Sealed and buried so as to render the corpse inviolable.'

'That is so. I thought nothing of it at the time. No one did. The dying whim of an old woman. It was harmless enough.'

'Harmless!' Malkar paced the floor, sandals rasping on the stone. 'A sweet young girl has suffered the pains of Sheol because of that vicious old hag! Is there no way the deed can be undone?'

Thagamista slowly stirred the puddle of wine. 'The creature possessing her body could be exorcised,' he admitted. 'It would take great sorcery and the powerful aid of amenable spirits but it could be done—if we had possession of the original body.'

'The mummy?' Malkar frowned. 'But you buried her. Surely you must know where she lies?'

'I did not and do not,' corrected the sorcerer quietly. 'She was interred by the priests of Phang and they will hold fast to their secret.'

'Your own magical power?'

'Is unable to penetrate the veil. Great spells and mighty magic have been used to build a wall I cannot break. I am sorry, Malkar, but the woman is doomed.'

'Let her die,' rumbled Hostig. 'The world is full of women.'

'But not as lovely as Ishma, eh, my friend?' Seyhat

stared shrewdly into Malkar's eyes. 'Ehu! I think you care for the wench, is it not so?'

Malkar frowned, remembering the succession of images he had seen while within the strange realm beyond the ebon disc. The men in a cell. the woman brushing her hair, others, among them that of a mummy buried in a forgotten wall.

'I have seen the body,' he said slowly. 'It is within the temple. But exactly where I do not know.'

'You have seen it?' Thagamista leaned close. 'Look into my eyes. Do not fight against my will. A vision holds all things even though we may not be aware of them. If you have seen the body it will give me the guidance I lack. Now look into my eyes, do not fight my will, look into my eyes.'

They grew larger, burning orbs of emerald fire which swelled to fill the world, the universe. A point of light in each eye began to spin, to drift together, to merge in a gigantic wheel of glowing brilliance. It slowed, diminished, became a spark, the double reflection of a torch in the sorcerer's eyes.

Malkar took a deep breath. 'It is done?'

'Yes,' said Thagamista. 'Now I know where the body is to be found.'

The table jerked again as they left the room, the walls creaking as if stone were sliding on stone and, from above, came a dreadful screaming. The shrieking grew louder as they mounted the stairs. Men raced down the passage beyond the door, wild-eyed, lips foaming in frantic terror. A woman stood, shrieking, tearing at her naked arms until the flesh ran red with blood. On the marbled floor something red oozed in a widening circle around the feathered headdress of a priest.

'The vengeance of Phang,' said Thagamista quietly. 'Already his servants die.'

Feet pounded towards them. A squad of guards filled the passage ushering men and women before them like sheep. An officer shouted at the rear.

'All to the temple! Only by great sacrifice and humble worship can we hope to win the grace of Phang! To the temple!' He slowed as he drew level to those in the doorway. 'You heard what I said. Hurry!'

He ran after his men. Thagamista glanced down the cleared passage.

'So far the gods are with us,' he said calmly. 'The mummy lies in a niche cut in the wall of the old temple. No man living knows how old it must be and few remember that there are foundations below foundations. If we can make our way to it we shall not be disturbed.'

Hostig growled as his big hand clamped around the hilt of his sword. 'Let those who disturb us beware. I am not in a mind to be gentle.'

'First we have to get there.' Seyhat was practical. 'You and I will walk to either side of the sorcerer while Malkar takes the lead. Any meeting us should take us for guards. If they do not we can take care of them. But wait for Malkar to give the word. Be not hasty with your sword.'

'And resist the lure of loot,' added Malkar curtly. 'All right, sorcerer. Guide me as we go.'

In a tiny knot they swept down the passage, through the

arch and into a small chamber. It led to a wide corridor lined with statues each holding a lance. Grave faces of stone looked at them as they walked the polished floor.

'The past kings of Dashkit,' murmured Thagamista. 'May Maram grant we live to add more to their number.'

The corridor ended, yielding to a vaulted chamber, a door, a short passage, beyond which came the sound of a multitude of voices. The chant broke as a woman screamed, returned to the hoarse commands of priests. Dank air gushed past them as Thagamista opened a hidden panel. Beyond the narrow opening lay a thick and odorous darkness.

'We need torches,' rumbled Hostig. 'I'll see what I can find.'

'Hold!' The sorcerer lifted his hands and uttered a spell. The darkness brightened, little droplets of luminescence glowing like a pearled mist. 'Truly the power of Phang is in the wane,' he murmured. 'My sorcery is unhindered.'

Stone stairs slimed with age fell sharply to a lower level. A flat space and then more stairs falling to a broad area flagged with chiselled stone, vaulted roofs stretching in either direction. Thagamista held out his hand.

'Give me a sword.'

Both hands gripping the hilt he stood, eyes closed, breathing in a peculiar rhythm. The sword lifted, the point weaving, steadying as he followed its direction, halting as it grated on stone. Casting aside the weapon the sorcerer rested both hands on the wall. Abruptly the stone shattered, fell in a spreading heap of rubble, dust rising as it hit the floor.

Revealed in the opening rested the square end of a metal coffin. In it, resting beneath a cover of transparent material, lay the sere and withered body of a crone.

'Carcilinamen,' said Thagamista quietly. 'Preserved by cunning arts against normal decay. Is this she who inhabits the body of our queen?'

'That's the thing I saw,' said Malkar. 'Can you free Ishma of her spell?'

The sorcerer stood, pondering. Around him the magical light swirled in a coiling mist of pearly brightness, each tiny droplet seeming to spark and die to be instantly replaced. Finally he stirred.

'It can be done but it were best not done here. The stone has absorbed much of her sorcerous power which would have to be overcome. In my old chambers I have many articles and objects of power. The pentagram inscribed on the floor is of value and there are scrolls it would be wise to consult.'

Malkar scowled. 'Your quarters? Here in the temple?'

'They are not far. A passage leads from the Hall of Kings.'

'Then let us go there,' said Hostig impatiently. 'I like not this place. I feel demons gnawing at my ghost.'

Supporting the coffin they climbed the ancient stairs. The upper door had closed after them. Malkar kicked it open, stepped through, grunting as the sharp corner of the coffin dug into his shoulder.

Beside him Seyhat drew in his breath with a sharp hiss. 'By the gods, we are taken!'

Waiting for them were a dozen men.



— five —

THEY WERE TALL, hard, the pick of the temple priests. From behind the shelter of their swords the High Priest spoke to the woman at his side.

'Your warning devices did not fail you, Ishma, my queen. What is your pleasure with these men?'

'Death,' she said coldly. 'It is long overdue. Kill them and have done with it.'

Feethan raised a hand. 'Certainly death,' he agreed. 'But a man can die in many ways. What manner of end should be meted out to those who have caused such disturbance?' His voice hardened. 'Hold! Lower the coffin at your peril!'

Malkar snarled as a sword pricked his throat. A man tore the sword from his hand as others disarmed the rest. Hampered by the weight and bulk of the coffin they were helpless to resist.

Thagamista said quietly, 'Struggle not. Our hour is yet to come.'

'Say you so, false sorcerer?' The High Priest thrust himself forward, his face contorted with anger. 'Think you that your weak god will replace the mighty Phang? I tell you that if half this city need to be sacrificed I will regain his favour!'

'A god does not return, priest. Not even a thing as vile as that you worship. Not to restore grace to those who have caused him ill. I tell you that you and yours stand in the

shadow of a terrible end. Plainly I can read your doom!'

'Silence!' Feethan raised his hand in a mystical gesture. Thagamista stared his contempt as it had no effect.

'You see, priest? No longer are you able to summon sorcerous power. Soon you must pay the debt you have accumulated. I say that I would not be in your shoes for all the wealth and knowledge of a world.'

'Speak again and the hilt of a sword shall smash your teeth!' The High Priest fought to control his rage. 'To the temple,' he snapped. 'To the great hall. Bring the coffin with you.'

'Not so!' The woman was quick to protest. 'I care not what you do with the prisoners but the coffin must be taken to my quarters. Guards. See to it!'

They hesitated, inflaming her anger.

'Guards!'

'They belong to the temple,' said Feethan coldly. 'Dedicated men who obey my commands for fear that their ghosts will howl for an eternity in outer darkness. And seek not to numb me with magic,' he added sharply as she lifted her hand. 'Yours will be as powerless as mine. Now! We have delayed too long! To the temple!'

They entered the great hall by a side door, passing between the dais and the congregation, halting at the polished slab of the altar. The air reeked of incense and the sharp taint of freshly spilled blood. Red-armed priests had turned the area into a shambles, the ripped bodies of sacrificial victims piled in a careless heap to one side.

Malkar looked at the ebon disc. It had changed. No longer did it swirl with a featureless mist, dark on darkness, shadows building and dissolving beneath the impact of monstrous life. Instead it was an ordinary slab of black material, the surface marred by a crack running from edge to edge.

He remembered the sword he had thrown and the wave of savage ferocity.

That ferocity still remained. He could sense it hovering in the air, a thing almost tangible with menace, a spiritual malaise and depressive chill.

The congregation felt it as they grovelled on the marble floor, chanting, pleading with their monstrous god to return and grace them with its favour.

The priests and servants of Phang felt it even stronger, their eyes filled with a sick desperation as they sought to save themselves with a deluge of sacrificial blood.

Hostig's voice rumbled as they lowered the coffin. 'Let us snatch swords and do what we can. If this is the end let us die like men.'

'Better to die fighting than to be tied and slit open like the bird of an augur,' agreed Seyhat. 'Give the sign, Malkar. Mayhap we can take that fiend of a priest with us. I would die content if I could be sure that his ghost screamed in hell.'

'Patience,' whispered Thagamista. 'Do nothing rash.'

He straightened, arms raised, voice like a throbbing organ as he uttered a stream of archaic syllables. Priests ran forward to silence him, slowing as they approached, finally halting frozen in attitudes of helpless despair. The guards stood as if stricken to stone.

In the coffin something moved.

It flickered with a skein of light, burning, fading, shimmering with variegated colour. The withered mummy stirred, seemed to come suddenly alive, clawed hands lifting towards the transparent cover. The hands blossomed with flesh, grew young, shone with health. The face filled, the skull disappearing beneath layers of fat and tissue, hair fell about the shoulders and the swelling figure burst the rotting shroud.

And then, abruptly, the resemblance of youth vanished and the mummy was as before.

'By the gods!' whispered Seyhat. 'What is happening?'

Malkar glanced to where Ishma stood beside the High Priest. Her hands were pressed to her face and she swayed as from her lips came a thin, endless scream.

Hostig snarled, his primitive nature inflamed by unknown mysteries, his every instinct urging him to kill what he could not understand. 'Malkar! Now! Let us cut free from this place!'

'Wait!'

Again the thing in the coffin moved, twisting as if trying to escape, to recapture its ghost. Over it the colours flickered, shimmering so that at one second it was a mummy, the next the fair and lovely body of the queen. Abruptly it glowed with a dull red fire and, in his mind, Malkar heard a frenzied shrieking.

'No! No! Great Phang, remember our bargain!'

The wailing died, shrilling like the grate of a pencil across slate as, within the coffin, fire rose to sear the lid, to consume the very last scrap of what it contained.

'It is done,' said Thagamista. 'The ghost of Carcinamen has gone shrieking to the lower depths and Ishma is free of the demon which possessed her.'

Malkar looked to where she stood, hands still pressed to her face, silent now as if bereft of life. He glanced at the guards and priests standing like statues. Even the assembled worshippers seemed to be carved from stone. The flames from the torches rose straight as if fashioned from glowing crystal.

'The power of Maram has stilled this moment of time,' said the sorcerer quietly. 'We alone within the magic circle about my person are able to move—and then not too far. But it is not all of my doing. Gods do not take only what they give and Phang is a hateful being of vengeful greed. His negation is accentuating my abilities. Alone here, even with the aid of Maram, I could not have exorcised the ghost. The High Priest made a mistake when he brought us to this place. Even yet he does not realise the enmity of his god.'

The torchlight flared. A sigh rose from the serried ranks kneeling on the marble floor. A guard moved with a faint click of accoutrements. Another dropped his hand to the hilt of his sword, his eyes wild with unknown fears.

'Now,' rumbled Hostig. 'Before the dogs recover from the spell. Three swords should cut us to the gates and freedom.'

Malkar edged to where a guard stood close to the High Priest, halting as Thagamista touched his arm.

'Wait. In this place lies a greater magic than edged and pointed steel. The cost of black sorcery has yet to be paid.'

'I've my own debts,' snarled Malkar. 'No matter what

may happen that vile dog of a priest will gloat no more. I'll teach him to feed me to his god.'

The torches flared higher. From the cracked disc behind the altar came a gust of noisome wind. Something invisible snapped with the echoes of shattering glass and, abruptly, the strange spell of immobility totally vanished.

'Watch,' said the sorcerer.

A priest came running towards them, screamed and slumped into a puddle of ooze. Another followed. Three others burst into shrieking pillars of smoking flame. All over the great hall the screams of the damned rose as the servants of Phang paid the debt they owed for use of magic.

The High Priest changed.

Where he had stood swayed a thing of horror, blood and fluids streaming from a carmine tree hung with the repulsive fruit of naked organs. Unseen power had turned him inside out, reversing his body as a man would strip off a flexible glove. From the midst of the ghastly thing rose the tongueless mewling of a man in an extremity of pain.

Malkar sprang forward, snatched a sword, swung it with a flashing glitter of steel. The edge bit, dragged, burst free

as the tormented man fell in two halves, silent in merciful death.

Lifting the weapon Malkar turned to where stood the queen. 'My lady,' he said harshly, 'Show me your face.'

Ishma lowered her hands. Her beauty remained but now her eyes were clear of evil; limpid pools into which a man could sink his heart.

'Malkar, you came with swords to set a king upon my throne. That man is dead—but you remain. Will you be my lord?'

Hostig chuckled as Malkar dropped the sword. 'What say you, comrade? Do we reap our fortunes? Who is to stop us taking what we will?'

'You're a fool.' Seyhat was curt. 'Malkar has better sense. Why take a part when you can take all. Eh, sorcerer?'

Thagamista said quietly, 'It is the will of Maram. Dash-kit yearns for peace and a gentle god. My sorcery will ease his path to the throne.'

Malkar smiled. Within his arms the pliant figure of Ishma snuggled against the muscles of his chest, her fingers combing the tangled mane of his hair.

For him the old magic was good enough.

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1958: May, Jun, Aug, Nov, Dec.	ea. .75
1959: Jan, Feb, Mar, Apr, May, June	ea. .75
1959: July, Aug, Sept, Oct.	ea. .75
1960: All issues	ea. .75
1961: July, Nov.	ea. .75
1962: All issues	ea. .75
1963: Feb, Mar, May, June, July, Nov, Dec. ea	60
1964: Feb, Mar, Apr, May, Jun, July	ea. 60
1964: Aug, Sept.	ea. 60
1965: Jan, May, Dec.	ea. 60
1966: Feb, Apr, Aug, Oct, Dec.	ea. 60
1967: Dec, Apr, June	ea. 60
1968: Feb, Jun, Sept, Nov.	ea. 60
1969: Jan, Mar, May, July, Nov.	ea. 60
1970: Jan, Mar, July, Sept, Nov.	ea. 50
1971: March	50
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1966: Jan, Aug, Sept, Dec.	60
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FUTURE:

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1961: Apr, Jun, Aug, Oct, Dec.	60
1962: Feb, Apr, Jun, Aug, Oct, Dec.	60
1963: Feb, Apr, Jun, Oct.	60
1964: Feb, Apr, Jun, Aug, Oct.	60
1965: Feb, Apr, Jun, Aug, Oct, Dec.	60
1966: Feb, Apr, June, Aug.	50
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1957: Feb, Apr, June, Aug, Oct, Dec.	75
1958: Feb, Apr, June, Aug, Oct, Dec.	75
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WANTED: IMMORTALITY NOW!

In the last issue of W&S an article appeared entitled "Who Wants to Live Forever?" which we had hoped would bring a flood of letters. Unfortunately, from the viewpoint of the writer, only a trickle of mail was received.

In view of the fact that, by an all-out effort, we were able to put a man on the moon in less than ten years, one wonders just what we could do in preventing the process of aging if we tackled the problem on a "crash" basis. As it is, the researchers in this field (and fortunately there are some) must try to get along on very meagre sums like grants to foundations, universities, etc. Mere chicken feed compared to our expenditures to develop more efficient ways of destroying life!

The reason for the apathy toward something so vital to everybody is difficult to understand. Perhaps people have become so conditioned by thousands of years of growing old and dying that they can conceive of nothing else, or perhaps most people just do not desire a long youthful life....

Possibly what is needed to stir the people of this country into action is the thought that the USSR is about to make a breakthrough in this field. There can be no doubt that they are working on it.

On the positive side, an article recently appeared in the L.A. Times headlined: "Youth Pill Expected; 100-Year Life Span Within Reach of Most, Doctor Says." The first paragraph sums up his views with: "Every normal person ought to live to be 100, and if he does not it is because of the way he manages his life."

This is a very interesting article but much too long to be reproduced here. However, the views expressed by the various gerontology experts interviewed covered the beginnings of research which could lead to eventual immortality for everyone. But they are just that, the beginning. Eventually we will see an age in which humans, after they attain physical maturity, will never change. Mankind's golden age, perhaps.

Proving there were some letters, we reproduce the following extracts:

From Dale Donaldson, "I wouldn't be too disturbed about the lack of response to your probe concerning aging prevention. Takes people a little time to get off their duffs to actually do anything. I suggest you expand a wee bit in the next issue. Bet you get a few responses next time. Also, if you've taken the time to analyze the age group of W&S as I have MOONBROTH, I think you'll find that the fifty-year-old reader would be under ten per cent of the total. Most younguns (unless they're fanatics) could care less about aging. I'm certain that you do have readers, though, that do care. They just don't want to be the ones to carry the ball. They don't even want to be on the line. They have to be forced into doing something. And the pen is mightier than the sword..."

Starting with that of John T. Dalie of Venice, Ca., the next three letters prove Dale partially right:

"was much interested in your proposal to 'start an organization for the purpose of promoting research into the causes of aging and dying.' Has your organization been formed yet? If so, I would like to become a member. For over three years now I have followed a daily anti-aging regimen of my own devising. If you are interested I will be glad to give you some idea of what I have been doing, and I will also send you a bibliography of various writings that I have found helpful. (We are certainly interested.) Since beginning these practices I have been told by a number of people that I look considerably younger. Recently a friend whom I had not met for almost ten years, exclaimed on seeing me: 'My God, Jack, don't you age?' By the way, are you familiar with the IMMORTALITY NEWSLETTER? The editor is Stuart Otto and you can subscribe for a year by sending \$3 to P.O. Box 696, San Marcos, Calif. 92069.

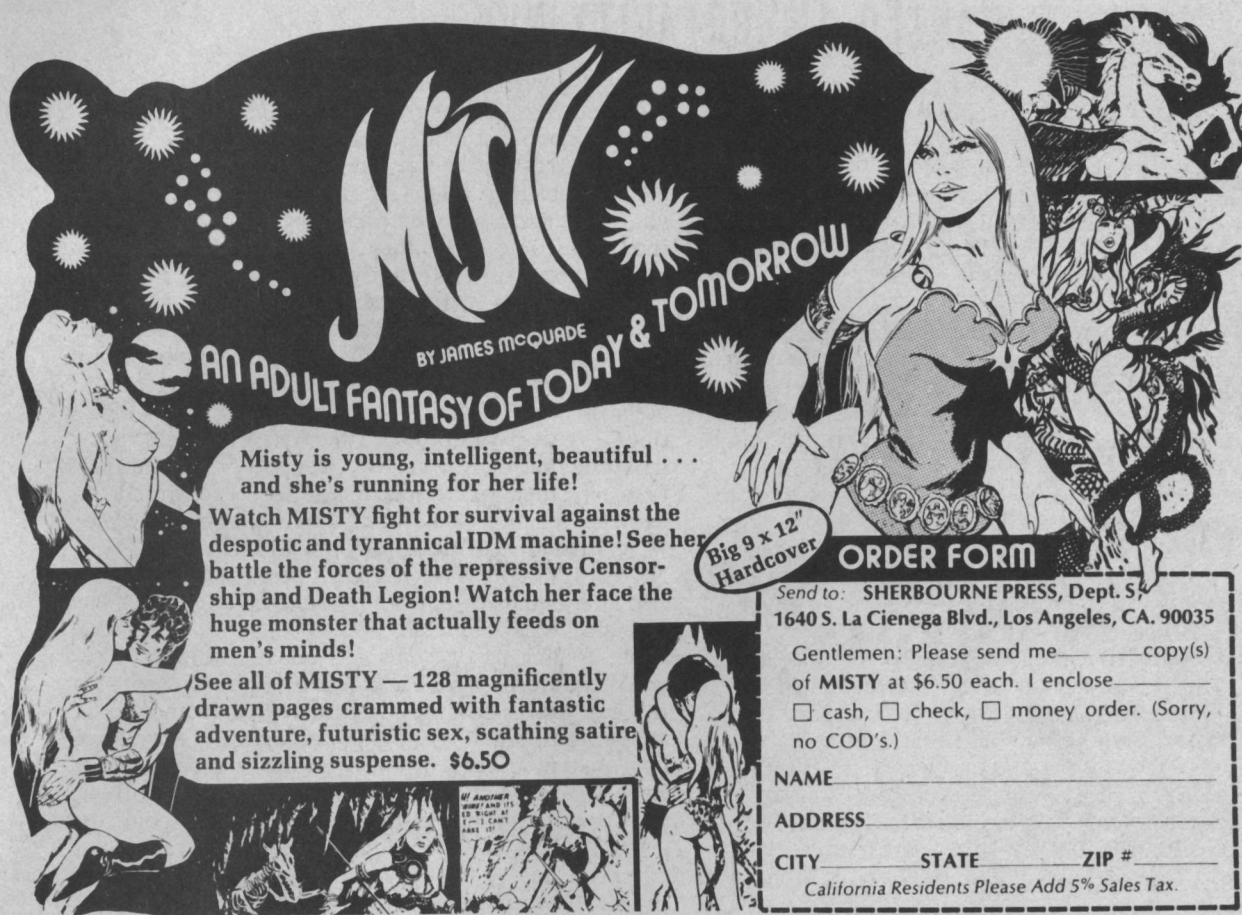
Joe D. Bicking of Topeka, Kansas, writes: "I saw your article in W&S about wanting persons to help in an organization for the purpose of promoting research into causes of aging and dying. I started out as a pre-med student (a heart attack stopped me), have been searching for answers and have built up a library of science and the occult...and could send a few dollars now and then to help...let me know."

From London, Jeremy Ward says: "While I was in the States on a holiday, I read your article in W&S—and was very interested. I have always felt that there was not enough research into the causes of aging and dying, and there is a great deal of work to be done in this field. For instance, why do people age at different rates? Why do creative artists tend to live longer than anyone else? I am a self-employed private tutor over here in London. Perhaps I could find someone over here who is interested. Myself I feel that the main problems will be: Firstly, as always, finance. Secondly, to collate everything that is being done and has been done in this field, and set up some new lines of research."

That's it; four letters out of a readership of several thousand on what is probably the most important subject mankind will ever know. But what is encouraging is the fact that every one of the four offered help of some sort. Unfortunately, because of the pressure of work and the fact that W&S #9 has been so long delayed, I've been unable to follow up these responses. I hope now that a few more will join in and we'll be able to set up some sort of organization.

I am quite aware of the fact that research will continue in this field whether or not I try to promote it. Also I am quite certain that a breakthrough is inevitable. It's just a question of when. Personally, I'd like to feel that I had something to do with speeding that "when." How about you? There's also the possibility the benefits of the breakthrough may not be given to the general public for many years. In which case, you and I may be left out in the cold, cold gravel!

—Bill Crawford



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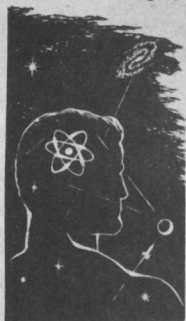
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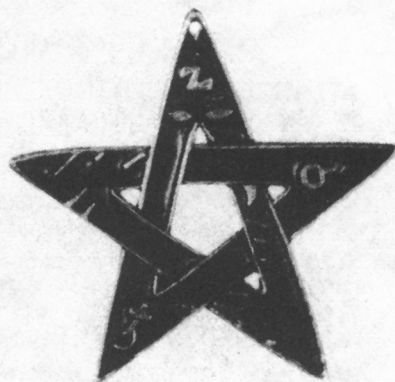
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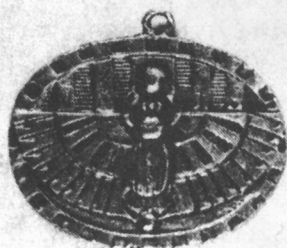
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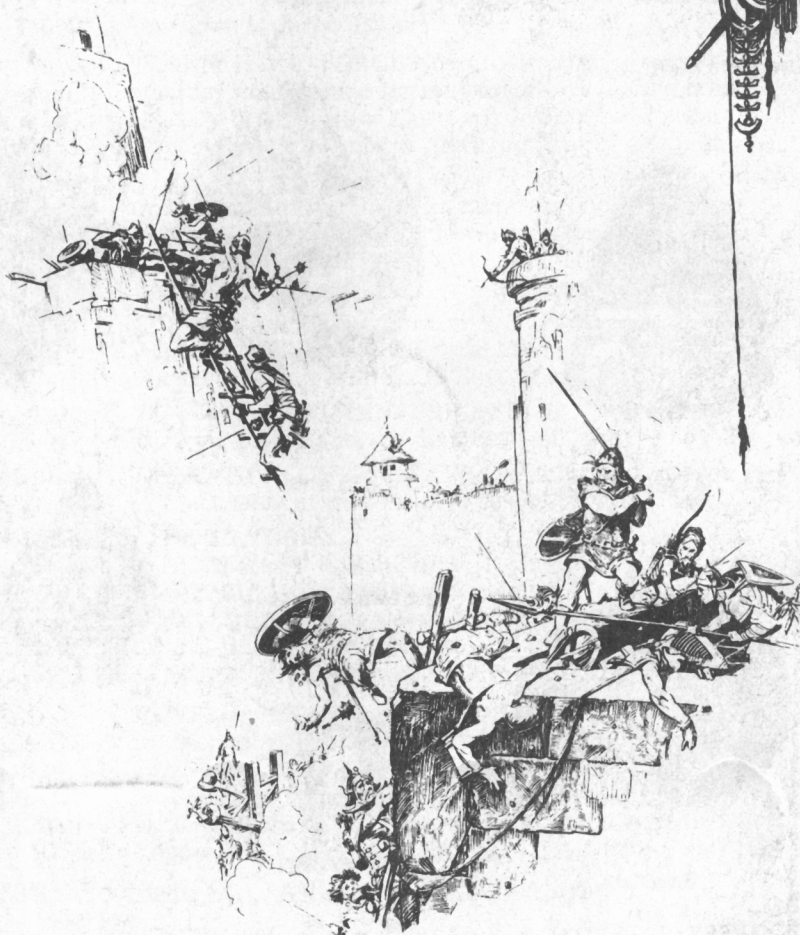
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