

World Fantasy Convention 1983



DREAMS THERE ARE TRUTHS

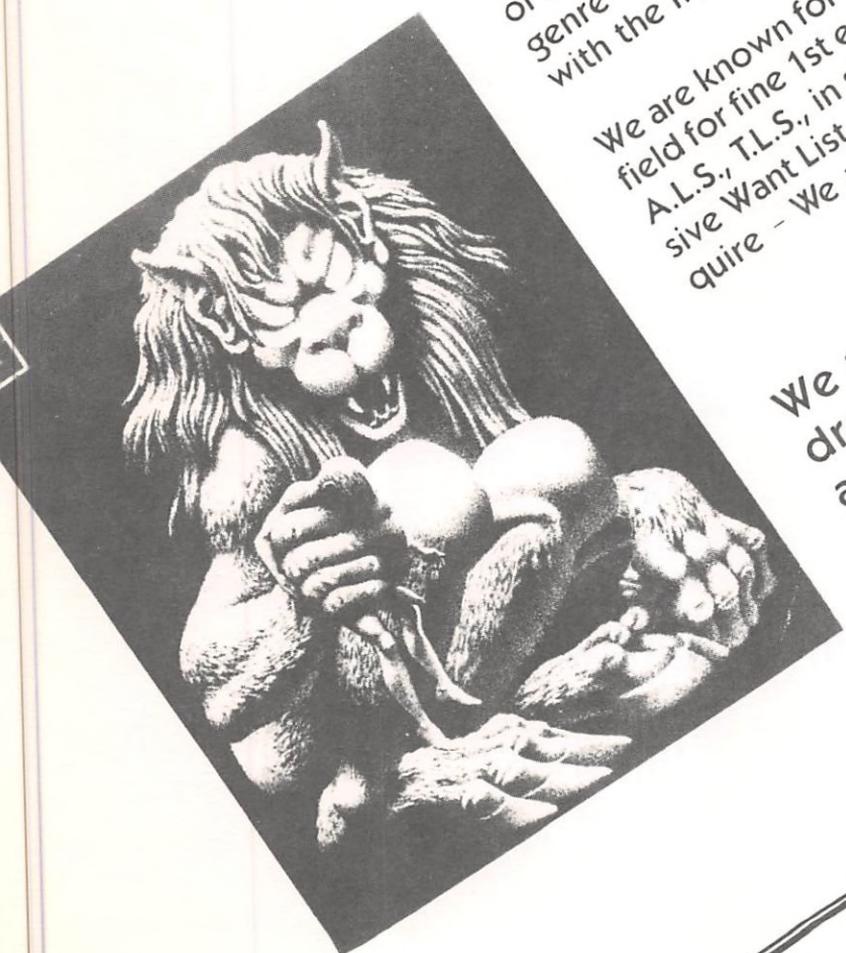
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WORLD FANTASY 1983

Sixty Years of Weird Tales

October 28 - 30, 1983 Marriott O'Hare Hotel - Chicago, Illinois

Guests

Gene Wolfe

Manly Wade Wellman

Rowena Morrill

Toastmaster

Robert Bloch

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
APPRECIATIONS:	
ABOUT MANLY WADE WELLMAN by Karl Edward Wagner	3
GENE WOLFE by Algis Budrys	7
ROWENA MORRILL by Robert Weinberg	9
A PROFILE OF ROBERT BLOCH by Stephen King	11
SPECIAL WEIRD TALES ARTICLES:	
THE SEARCHER AFTER HORROR by Robert Bloch	15
WORLD OF WEIRD, 1931 - 1932 by Jack Williamson	23
THE MOST POPULAR STORIES IN WEIRD TALES 1924 TO 1940 by Sam Moskowitz .	27
ALL NEW FANTASY FICTION:	
THE CAT by Gene Wolfe	39
WILLOW HE WALK by Manly Wade Wellman	43
INCARNATE by Ramsey Campbell	51
ONE TO CHICAGO by Hugh B. Cave	57
THE MONSTER ON HOLD by Philip José Farmer	61
THE BLACK RECALLED by Brian Lumley	73
NEITHER BRUTE NOR HUMAN by Karl Edward Wagner	79

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INTRODUCTION

Sixty years ago, a magazine was born that became a legend. *Weird Tales*, "The Unique Magazine" was created by J. C. Henneberger as a vehicle for stories by major writers of that day that, because of their unusual content, could not be placed in conventional magazines. Henneberger never did succeed in attracting those authors who had originally voiced such concerns. However, he did provide a suitable home for the works of H. P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, Clark Ashton Smith and nearly all of the other major fantasy writers from 1923 through 1954. He also created a market for the unique graphics of Virgil Finlay, Hannes Bok, Margaret Brundage, Lee Brown Coye and other greats in the fantasy illustration field. And it was all done on a shoe-string budget.

Calling *Weird Tales* unique was an understatement. During its golden age, under the editorial guidance of Farnsworth Wright, the magazine published some of the finest short weird fiction ever set down on paper. It was a magazine where the unthinkable was thought. Taboos were few—not only for a pulp magazine but for any magazine of the time when the puritan ethic still ruled. In nearly half the stories published during Wright's tenure as editor, evil triumphed over good. Grotesque horror was commonplace. Sex, while not overly graphic, was permissible and even included necrophilia and

incest, topics never seen in the most liberal publications of the day. Stories of madness and psychological aberration were sandwiched between space opera and psychic detective mysteries. This was not to claim that every story published was a classic. There were numerous mediocre stories published as well. But the average level of quality was extremely high for a magazine that rarely paid more than a penny a word, on publication.

The 1983 World Fantasy Convention is dedicated to *Weird Tales* and the people that made it great. This Souvenir Book is a new anthology of tributes to our guests, articles on *Weird Tales*, and new fiction. All of our contributors would have been right at home in "The Unique Magazine." Some were. All of them share an exceptional talent for art or writing that would have placed them among the forefront of the magazine's contributors. In a sense, they all are contributors to that great pulp. For *Weird Tales* is not dead. A state of mind can never die and as long as there are people who enjoy stories of the strange, the unusual, and the bizarre, "The Unique Magazine" will remain alive.

Robert Weinberg
Chairman
World Fantasy 1983

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1983 FANTASY CON GUEST OF HONOR

ABOUT MANLY WADE WELLMAN

by

Karl Edward Wagner

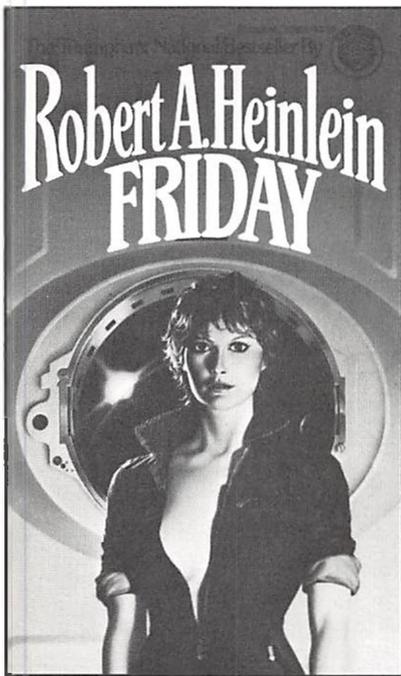
Manly Wade Wellman was born May 21, 1903 in the village of Kamundongo in Portuguese West Africa (now known as Angola), where his father was a medical missionary. The second white child born in the area, Wellman spoke the native dialect before he learned English and was adopted as a son by the most powerful chief of the region. Two childhood visits to Edwardian London may have had some civilizing influence; to be sure, they instilled an abiding love of that country, from which his Devonshire ancestors had emigrated to Jamestown in 1630. Wellman's parents returned to the United States in time for his sixth birthday, which he celebrated not long after having watched President Taft's inauguration.

When his parents separated, Wellman grew to manhood living in many parts of the country—Utah, Virginia, Arkansas, Kansas—never staying very long in any one place. He travelled a lot on his own—hopping freights, on horseback, by car, often just on foot. During the summers of his school years Wellman scraped along at various temporary jobs: harvest hand, house painter, lumber stacker, cowboy, soda bottler, newspaper work. His favorite job was as bouncer in a tough Prohibition-Era roadhouse. At a Utah prep school Wellman played center on the football team; his family felt he lacked promise and had no plans to send him to college, but Wichita University (today Wichita State) wanted him for their team and gave Wellman a football scholarship. Minus a few teeth, Wellman graduated with a B.A. in 1926; feeling that this small school degree was of little use, he then attended Columbia University in New York, where he received a B. Lit. in 1927. From there Wellman returned to Wichita, Kansas to work as a reporter for the *Beacon* and later for the *Eagle*.

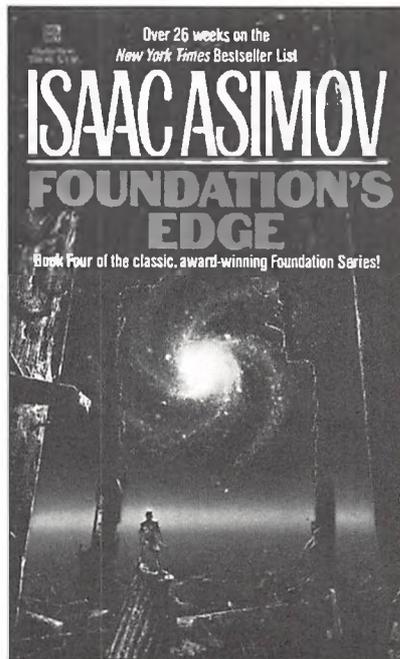
From his earliest school years, Wellman had wanted to be a writer. Very much a fan of the Dime Novels of the day, he wrote similar stories of his own and swapped them with boyhood pals for their old magazines. As is usually the case, teachers, family and friends did all they could to discourage him. Juvenile efforts were laughed at and destroyed. Classmates refused to believe that a big dumb jock could write and insisted that Wellman merely was plagiarizing his stories. Despite their best efforts, Wellman met with early success; by 1925 his poetry was being published, and his stories began to appear in various obscure pulps and magazines, such as *Ozark Stories*. One of his first sales was the African story, "When the Lion Roared," which appeared in the May 1927 issue of *Thrilling Tales*. The magazine billed Wellman as "The King of Jungle Fiction"—a phrase his Columbia classmates turned to "The King of Bungled Diction." Across another story, written as a prep school assignment, his teacher wrote: "Your work is impossible!" Farnsworth Wright later thought otherwise, and bought this story, "Back to the Beast," for *Weird Tales*, where it appeared in the November 1927 issue—the first of some fifty stories Wellman was to sell to that magazine.

In those early years, Wellman relates; "I'd write a piece of copy for anybody for anything." This included articles and filler, often uncredited, for the Macfadden chain of magazines (*Master Detective*, *True Detective Mysteries*, etc.), as well as poetry (often used as filler for newspaper columns), radio scripts, historical pageants, gags for humor magazines, movie reviews, and lyrics for sheet music. All of this was in addition to his newspaper work, which came to an abrupt end in 1930, when a hungover editor started to cuss out Wellman and Wellman quit on

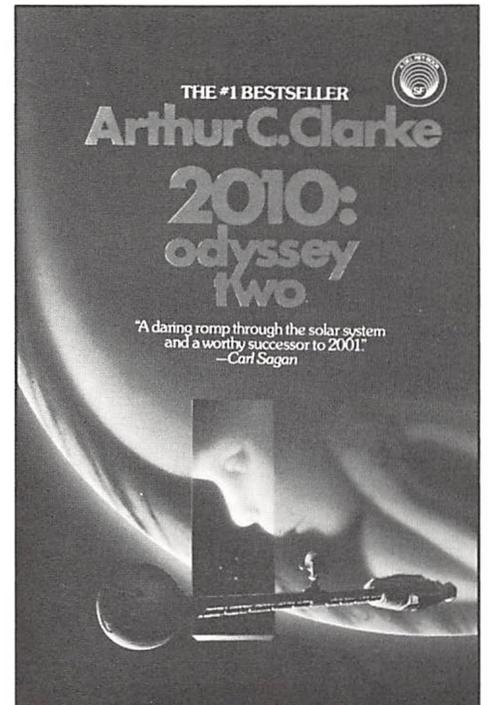
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the spot after exchanging some words. It was 1930, the teeth of the Depression—and Wellman had decided to become a full-time writer. He celebrated his decision by marrying his girlfriend, a young music student named Frances Obrist.

For the first few years they ham-and-egged it along, Wellman selling wherever he could. It was at this point that Wellman began to hit the science fiction markets, beginning with the Gernsback magazines (“a penny a word, payable upon lawsuit”). Gernsback bought several of Wellman’s earliest stories, including what was to be Wellman’s first book: *The Invading Asteroid*, a space-opera thriller published as a promotional booklet. In order to be closer to his markets, Wellman moved to New York in 1934, taking a battered suitcase and worse battered portable typewriter, leaving Frances to wait until he had made a start. Some quick sales to the Macfadden magazines paid for her train ticket, and Frances joined him in New York, at a time when “for a dollar a day you could get along all right.” In 1935 Wellman sold “Outlaws of Callisto” to *Astounding* for \$150—an awesome sum. The story made the cover of the April 1936 issue and attracted the attention of Julius Schwartz, the science fiction agent of the day, who took Wellman as a client. Fifty years later, Wellman’s writing career is still going strong.

While Wellman sold to all markets and genres, until the end of World War II he was primarily a writer of science fiction and fantasy. Of the two genres, his work in the fantasy field particularly stands out. This is not surprising, as Wellman has been an avid reader of legends and ghost stories since childhood, and his earliest poems and stories dealt with the fantastic. Wellman proudly states that he owes his development as a writer to *Weird Tales* and especially to its editor, Farnsworth Wright. Wellman was reading *Weird Tales* at the time when it first appeared on the newsstands, but it wasn’t until he read Lovecraft’s “The Outsider” in the April 1926 issue that his affection for the pulp caught fire, and that he began to submit material to *Weird Tales*. It was Farnsworth Wright who insisted that a story be convincing, who requested multiple revisions until the story was right (sometimes asking a final revision even after having accepted the story), and who started Wellman on the tricky road that makes a selling writer a great writer. Wellman sold some fifty stories—approximately 300,000 words—to *Weird Tales*, staying with the pulp after Wright was forced out and virtually to the end of its existence. *Weird Tales* brought out the best in Wellman’s writing, and he became one of its most popular authors. Indeed, after the deaths of Lovecraft and Howard and the semi-retirement of other stalwarts of the early years, Wellman’s fiction became one of the pulp’s strongest features, particularly during the long decline under McIlwraith.

In 1939 Wellman moved to New Jersey. By now Wellman was well established as a science fiction writer and was one of the more popular members of the Better Publications stable—turning out action-packed space

opera for the adolescent-oriented *Thrilling Wonder Stories* and *Startling Stories*, as well as Street & Smith’s slightly more mature *Astounding* (until a quarrel with editor John Campbell over Wellman’s *Twice in Time*, which Campbell rejected, caused Wellman to break with that magazine). This same period saw the birth of comic books, and Wellman wrote extensively for this new field, creating both characters and storylines of countless obscure and famous comics—among them: Captain Marvel, the Spirit, Blackhawk, Green Lantern, Prince Ibis, Captain America, Plasticman, Spy Smasher, and many more. By an odd twist of fate, Wellman’s work on the first Captain Marvel comics later made his testimony the key to D.C.’s successful plagiarism suit against Captain Marvel.

With the outbreak of World War II, Wellman joined the Army and served in New Jersey as a first lieutenant—still writing vigorously for the pulps and the comics. After the war, times were changing, and so was Wellman. The comics boom was over; the pulps were dying out. For many of the old pulp writers, this was the end of the trail. Not so for Wellman. In 1946 Wellman’s story of an American Indian detective, “A Star For a Warrior,” won the first Ellery Queen Award (beating out a bitter William Faulkner). This not only established a pattern for Wellman’s successful entry into mainstream writing, but the \$2000 prize money made it possible for him to move from New Jersey to Pine Bluff, North Carolina. In 1947 Wellman’s first hardcover book was published—a highly successful mystery novel entitled *Find My Killer*. In 1949 Wellman’s major work, a biography of Confederate General Wade Hampton, *Giant in Gray*, came out from Scribners. In 1951 Wellman moved to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where his typewriter turned to scholarly books on the Civil War, mainstream novels, county histories, and countless books for teenage readers. For twenty years, Wellman all but vanished from the fantasy genre.

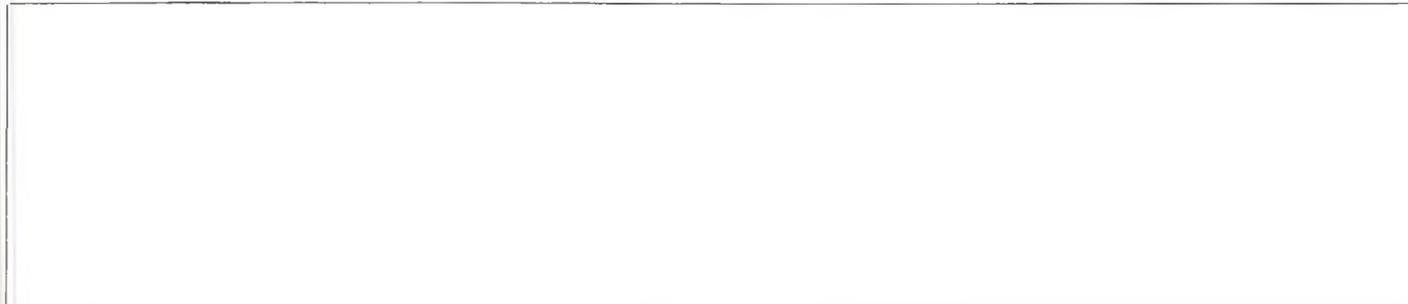
There was one very notable exception: a series of stories published in *Fantasy & Science Fiction* during the 1950s dealing with a wandering Appalachian balladeer, named simply John, who fought supernatural evil with the aid of his wits and a guitar with silver strings. Most of these stories were collected in a 1963 Arkham House book, *Who Fears the Devil?*—many times reprinted and made into a movie in 1972. The John stories were something entirely new in the subgenre of occult investigators, and reflected Wellman’s lifelong interest in folklore and music as well as his love for his new home in North Carolina.

Fortunately for his fans, Wellman’s departure from the fantasy field was not a permanent one. By the beginning of the 1970s, Wellman stopped writing juveniles and returned to his fantasy roots, writing new stories for *Witchcraft & Sorcery*, *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, and *Whispers*. In 1973 the publication by Carcosa of *Worse Things Waiting*, a thick collection of Wellman’s best fantasy stories, renewed both Wellman’s interest in this genre and readers’ interest in Wellman. *Worse Things*

Waiting won the World Fantasy Award for best collection, and Wellman later himself won the World Fantasy Award for lifetime achievement. Wellman's short stories again began to appear in magazines and anthologies, and, following a pair of science fiction books for Warner, Wellman embarked upon a new series of fantasy novels for Doubleday, reviving his earlier characters Judge Pursuivant, John Thunstone, and John the Balladeer (now christened "Silver John" by some copyeditor at Doubleday, much to Wellman's disgust). In 1982 Carcosa again published a massive omnibus of Wellman's earlier fantasy stories, *Lonely Vigils*. Doubleday has been publishing one new Wellman novel each year, with contracts for new ones stretching into the future.

To date Wellman has written more than 250 stories and nearly eighty books—a body of work that any author can envy. It may come as a surprise to fantasy fans to

know that only about one quarter of these books are science fiction or fantasy; unlike many writers whose work is limited to these genres, Wellman has written in virtually every field, and his books include one Pulitzer Prize finalist. Today Manly Wade Wellman and his wife of more than fifty years, Frances (herself a *Weird Tales* author), have made Chapel Hill their permanent home—although many trips to the North Carolina mountains and to England have made both of these places as dear to their hearts as the University of North Carolina basketball and football teams. Wellman celebrated his 80th birthday this past May, surrounded by friends and former creative writing students. Afterward Wellman began work on his 77th book. As a full-time professional writer for more than fifty years, Wellman has no more thought of retirement than did Jesse James.



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GENE WOLFE

by

Algis Budrys

One of the most interesting technical aspects of Gene Wolfe's stories is that their characters move through clearly defined spaces. Usually these are houses, although they can be libraries, palaces, city gateways, botanical gardens, or, as in *The Fifth Head of Cerberus*, other sorts of establishment.

This is not a common trait among writers. We all visualize the settings for the events in our reading, but if you look at the settings in a Wolfe story, you will notice that you can practically see every shingle on the inn, every tome on the library shelves, every tree in every garden, root, branch, and leaf. There is something about the way he writes that predisposes the reader's mind toward matters of this sort of detail. And it is detail, yet it does not burden the imagination, enriching it instead.

I think Wolfe's best illustrator would be Winsor McCay, if we could but waken *Little Nemo's* creator from his slumber. I used to think Aubrey Beardsley, and a Beardsley-illustrated Book of The New Sun would be a wondrous thing, I think, but over the entire haul, McCay. The houses, you see . . . the triumphal arches, the cells of the Torturers Guild with their ingenious devices. Severian drowning under the lillies, contrasted with Dorcas in the gardens; the emperor's palace, the temple of the Pelerines, the small Severian among the looming mountains, the rambling house of *Peace*, the convoluted blocks of the shingled units accreted one by one to form the angular, wooden worm of the inn in *The Devil in A Forest*. . . .

All right, then, Wyeth. Any Wyeth. They would do well, I think, with the inn's roofs and chimneys, the shingling and the dappled shadows confusing the doors and windows, and the dead knight striding by slowly in the night, his countenance private, as if illuminated by lightning in the midst of a dreadful memory.

As with few other writers, no matter how accomplished otherwise, we have actually been in all the spaces Wolfe shows us. There is a market, I think, for a meticulously done book of models . . . intricately lined cut-out folds and interlockings which, when properly

done, yield little inns, little guildhalls, little cities filling the shelves of a den, their streets and structures descending in unstraight ranks down over the encyclopedia and the back of the couch, putting out intriguing little districts of artists' housing and clever little shops to ruck up the antimacassars and establish outposts on the end-tables and so, by way of music halls and food stalls, onto the rug. We come down in the morning, and there is the book lying open on the table, with the pastepot and scissors beside it, the wastebasket full of cuttings, and our establishment overrun. "Wolfe has been here in the night!" we cry, wondering why we hadn't thought to put out cookies and milk, pausing to wonder . . . the milk of *what* creature?

Well, Gene Rodman Wolfe was born in Brooklyn, May 7, 1931, spent a fair part of his youth and young manhood in Texas and Korea, lives in Barrington, Illinois, a Chicago exurb rather grittier and some miles to the west of Ray Bradbury's Waukegan, and he dwells in what at first appears to be a small house with his wife, Rosemary, and the occasional presence of some of their two sons and two daughters. He goes to work in the morning at a publication called *Planet* . . . no, *Plant Engineering*, and no one knows, to see him come and go, that he is in fact at rest and the world moves around him, bending and flowing into shapes he transcribes in the earlier hours when the streets are still and the coffee urns down at the editing shop are yet cold.

The spaces we see come from the time Gene Wolfe finds outside the normal bounds of common human time. When most things begin, Gene Wolfe's things have already been at work. It would seem at first that the person who would fathom Wolfe has but so set his alarms to go off a few hours sooner than they ordinarily do. But this will actually do you no good, because you will still not be awake in the same world Gene Wolfe has been up in.

Well, Gene Wolfe is about *this* tall, and his weight, considered in proportion, is a touch high. No one you know has ever seen a picture of him, no matter how

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ROWENA MORRILL

by

Robert Weinberg

Selecting guests for any convention is difficult business. Choosing Guests-of-Honor for a major gathering like the World Fantasy Convention is much more so as there are so many people deserving honors.

Dedicating this year's convention to "Sixty Years of *Weird Tales*" did make one choice for the convention committee an easy one. For the Artist Guest-of-Honor only one person was ever considered: Rowena Morrill.

In many ways, the science fantasy art field has not changed much in the past sixty years. It has always been an area dominated by men. Those few women who have managed to break into the elite club of fantasy cover artists have always had to produce work superior to their male counterparts. Just as good was not good enough. Only in the past few years has there been any attempt to judge women artists as *artists* and not *women artists*. In the 1930s, there was Margaret Brundage. In the 1980s, there is Rowena Morrill.

In many ways, the two had parallels in their careers. Neither intended to be a fantasy artist. Brundage was trained as a fashion designer and turned to cover illustration due to depression economics. Rowena did not start painting until the age of twenty-three, and then only as a part-time avocation, never dreaming that it would become a full-time profession. Rowena is famous for her vivid color use and transparent glazes that make her paintings seem to leap off a cover. Brundage's works in pastel chalk were unique in their day.

Rowena's sensuous women have charmed and outraged fans for the past few years. Her painting for *King Dragon* was attacked by some feminists as degrading to women. Much of the complaint seemed to be centered not on the painting (which featured a flying dragon hovering over an intended female sacrifice) but that it was done by a woman artist. Completely ignored was the fact that Rowena was the artist whose success brought about the acceptance of women in the fantasy art field. Brundage was also famous for her controversial nudes, which had stirred little response among readers

until they learned that the paintings were done by a woman.

Weird Tales contained stories by the top fantasy authors of the 1930s, including Robert E. Howard, Seabury Quinn, C. L. Moore and Hugh Cave to name just a few. Brundage did covers for stories by all of these authors. Interestingly enough, Brundage never did a cover for an H. P. Lovecraft story (as HPL never had a cover illustrating any story under his own name in *Weird Tales*). Rowena, on the other hand, did do an exceptional cover for a Lovecraft paperback collection featuring a monster that any friend of Cthulhu would have felt quite comfortable with. Rowena also has done exceptional paintings for books by *Weird Tales*' contributors Manly Wade Wellman and E. Hoffmann Price. Her art for Clark Ashton Smith's *The City of the Singing Flame* and *The Last Incantation* are probably the finest interpretations of Smith's work ever put on canvas.

Rowena has also illustrated works by all of the major names in the fantasy field today. Her covers have added to the works of Roger Zelazny, Theodore Sturgeon, Alfred Bester, Michael Moorcock, Piers Anthony, and Paul Hazel to name just a few.

Just as there are parallels between the careers of these two exceptional artists, there are major differences as well. Brundage never could create a believable monster. Rowena's creations seem to have a life of their own. When *Weird Tales* moved to New York in 1938, it signalled an end to Margaret Brundage's career as a cover artist after only six years. Rowena's career has been on a meteoric upswing that shows no signs of faltering.

Rowena has done cover paintings for Ace, Berkley, Timescape, Del Rey and just about every other major paperback and hardcover publisher in the fantasy field. Paintings of hers have been used as jackets for major limited edition hardcovers. She was a featured contributor to the 1981 *Tolkien Calendar*. Work by her has appeared in *Omni* and *National Lampoon*. Limited edition prints of her paintings have become major col-

lectibles. *The Fantastic Art of Rowena*, a large size full color trade paperbound book from Pocket Books has already been acclaimed the art book of the year.

Rowena Morrill, like Margaret Brundage fifty years before her, has blazed a new path for women in the fantasy art field. While not a crusader, through the sheer quality of her work she has opened doors where no doors ever existed before. Her selection as Artist Guest-of-Honor at the World Fantasy Convention is just the latest in a series of awards and honors she has justly received. For, as fantasy artist Boris Vallejo so aptly stated in *The Fantastic Art of Rowena* ". . . she has established herself not only as one of the top women fantasy illustrators, but one of the top fantasy illustrators *per se*. . . ."

Gene Wolfe by Algis Budrys (continued from page 7)

young, in which he had a full head of hair. He cocks his head and looks quizzically at you, as if the lenses of his eyeglasses were showing him one of the most cunningly constructed creatures on God's earth, and in his rather high voice he begins dealing out the quick words in which he encourages you to explain yourself.

And, well, although he never seems to move especially fast, it's noticeable that he often appears in two or more well-separated places within strikingly short intervals of time. It may be he does not have to walk as far as most people do to get from here to there. It may be, since all the rooms are his, that he knows where the more amenable passages are.

In truth, nothing is known about Gene Rodman Wolfe, born May 7, 1931, in an especial quarter of Samarkand and resident since then in parts of which the reports are yet incomplete.



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A PROFILE OF ROBERT BLOCH

by

Stephen King

I checked my copy of Ambrose Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary* rather carefully, but could not find a definition of "deadline." Therefore, I offer my own:

Deadline: 1. A date at the arrival of which the writer must pick up the telephone and explain to his editor how his mother died, his dog got distemper, and one of his kids came home from second grade with herpes; that's why he needs another six weeks' worth of grace on his current assignment. 2. A date the writer always remembers while on the verge of going to sleep the night before; he therefore cannot sleep all that night because his mind insists on thinking up ever wilder excuses (mother run over by a city bus, dog not just distempered but actually rabid, etc.).

I had intended to do a warm and lovely appreciation of Bob Bloch — about fifty pages of uplifting phrases and inspiring subordinate clauses — but I suddenly realized last night that the dreaded *deadline* had almost arrived. I therefore called the proper people this morning (collect — you always call collect) and explained about how my mother had rabies and my dog had been run over by a city bus; I sounded sincere as hell to myself but I must not have been too convincing, because I was not given six weeks of grace but only three days. The cheap bastards wouldn't even spring for Federal Express ship-page . . . and neither would Bob, when I called him (collect). But then, I always knew that if I stayed in this business long enough, I would eventually find out who my friends were.

Anyway, my chance to do fifty pages of *baa-salaams* at the feet of the Wisconsin Wonder has passed, and so I decided to settle upon this dry thumbnail profile. Sorry, Bob. If you could have come up with the lousy \$13.85 for Federal Express, I might have been able to do better.

Robert Bloch, American Writer

Birth

Like bluesmen John Lee Hooker and Muddy Waters, Robert Bloch was born in Chicago (1917). Unlike Hooker and Waters, Bloch is white and plays a typewriter instead of a guitar. Also unlike Hooker and Waters, Bloch is alive.

Early Schooling

Attended local schools until first patrol-boys and then teachers began to disappear. Asked to leave. Did so . . . by a large, smoking, sulphurous hole which suddenly appeared in the middle of the Wing B floor.

University Training

Attended Dunwich (Mass.) Preparatory Academy, graduated Miskatonic University (R.I.) 1939. Left with an extremely valuable copy of *The Necronomicon*. Undergraduate degree held in escrow until the book was returned. Bloch finally returned it (missing several pages, it was later discovered). The book has since disappeared again, and is reputed to be in Stuart Schiff's private collection, with the missing pages restored.

Graduate Studies

Bloch did graduate work in Leng, which he annoyingly insists on referring to as "the dream-haunted Plains of Leng" to this day. Was awarded a degree in Demonology. His specialty was "pronouncements"; he is one of the few people in the world today who *really* know how to pronounce such jawbreakers as Yog-Sothoth, R'yleh, Cthulhu, Nyarlathotep, Yig, and Ronald Reagan.

A Letter Bloch Probably Regrets

First published work: A letter about Conan the Barbarian in *Weird Tales*. After reading one of Howard's tales, Bloch wrote in and suggested that the Barbarian ought to be set to cutting out paper-dolls with his sword, because that was all he was good for. Edmund Wilson would no doubt have applauded.

A Flowery Debut

First published story; "Lillies," in the fanzine *Marvel Stories*.

He Hasn't Been to Cleveland Since

First successful Demonic Calling: 1938, in Cleveland. Shortly after calling the demon (a relatively minor one named Terre Haute Beelzebub who is reputed to specialize in fire-storms and three-cushion bank shots), the 9th Street Gas-Works exploded. Connection is casual but persuasive . . . like the link between cigarettes and lung cancer. Bloch is mum on the subject.

Early Fiction

In 1935 he published "The Feast in the Abbey" in *Weird Tales*, the first of about seventy "Lovecraft Circle" stories Bloch has written. Only the work of Frank Belknap Long and Donald Wandrei can match the work Bloch did in the years 1935-1945, and I would argue that much of it has never been matched. If you doubt this, I urge you to re-read *Pleasant Dreams* and *The Opener of the Way*, Arkham House collections which showcase the best of Bloch's earlier fiction. In the years following World War II, Bloch's short fiction began to take in a wider range of material. It was sometimes playful (as in "Time Wounds All Heels"), sometimes horrific. Bloch wrote for radio during this period (*Stay Tuned for Horror*, *Dimension X*), and he wrote science fiction.

Something about Hair

In 1946 Bloch began to lose his hair. Various demonic spells have retarded this process, but none—heh-heh—have been able to stop it.

A Novel Appraisal

Also in the late 40s, Bloch began to publish novels, and in the 50s he did some of his most important work, creating a number of novels that were potent hybrids—not quite horror novels, not quite mystery novels, but stories that fans of both genres quickly took to their hearts. What Bloch did with such novels as *The Deadbeat*, *The Scarf*, *Firebug*, *Psycho*, and *The Couch* was to re-discover the suspense novel and to re-invent the antihero as first discovered by James Cain and then amplified into an existential dirigible by Sartre. The difference is that Cain's antiheroes were weak men who underwrote their own damnation (free will); Bloch's antiheroes are in most cases damned into dangerous insanity for Freudian (predestinate) reasons. I would argue that

Black Mask Magazine made James M. Cain possible; Cain made Sartre possible; and finally Bloch, who was doing quite well as a writer of fantasy and science fiction and who was in no need of creation and thus came to his subject matter wholly unfettered and not in the least concerned about his antecedents, took Sartre's people and stuck them in settings which are for the most part American Suburban (the Bates Motel, sitting in isolated splendor along some deserted road which the turnpike rendered obsolete, is actually the exception to the general rule). He said in effect: *Here—this is what all that existentialist crap means to postwar America. You got your big cars, you got your big TVs, you got it all on Easy Credit Terms. But don't look behind you, friends, because the werewolf is there, and he is beginning to gain. He is not Tony Perkins; he's just the guy sitting in the back of the bus when you go to work in the morning, the one who picks his nose with one hand and keeps his other on the knife in his pocket. He's after you, but not for any understandable reason like the insurance money or so he can sleep with your wife; he's just after you because . . . he's after you.* These are also, in a strange way that only 20th century people would understand, rather funny novels; the compulsive murderer in *The Couch* reflects with dopey Mark Chapman solemnity that on some days you only see pregnant women on the streets, and he speculates on the possibility that they might have all been hit by a super sperm-bomb. The desperate laughter in these novels echoes up over twenty years to the sound of similar laughter coming from such books as Kotzwinkle's *Doctor Rat* and Levin's *The Stepford Wives*.

The Fix May Have Been In

In 1958, Bloch won a Hugo for "That Hellbound Train."

The Director's Name Slips My Mind

In 1960, Bloch's novel *Psycho* was adapted into a film. Critical reaction at the time was generally unfavorable. Hindsight suggests the film may have been better than was at first believed.

*Bob is Just Grateful No One Has Told
the National Enquirer Yet*

For awhile in the 40s and 50s, Bloch, who was born in Chicago, used the pen-name Tarleton Fiske. Today, there is a catcher for the Chicago White Sox name Carlton Fisk. There have been rumors about this. Bloch is mum.

Final Appraisal

Bloch has continued to write short stories and novels; he has also written for TV (*Thriller*, *Star Trek*, *The Darkroom*, etc.) and for films (*Strait-Jacket*, which Bloch wrote, was arguably Joan Crawford's last great film). He is witty, personable, and gently—as a writer he is the pro's pro, as a conversationalist he is the sort of person you always hope you will run into in a bar (and to whom you so seldom do), as a friend he is nonpareil.

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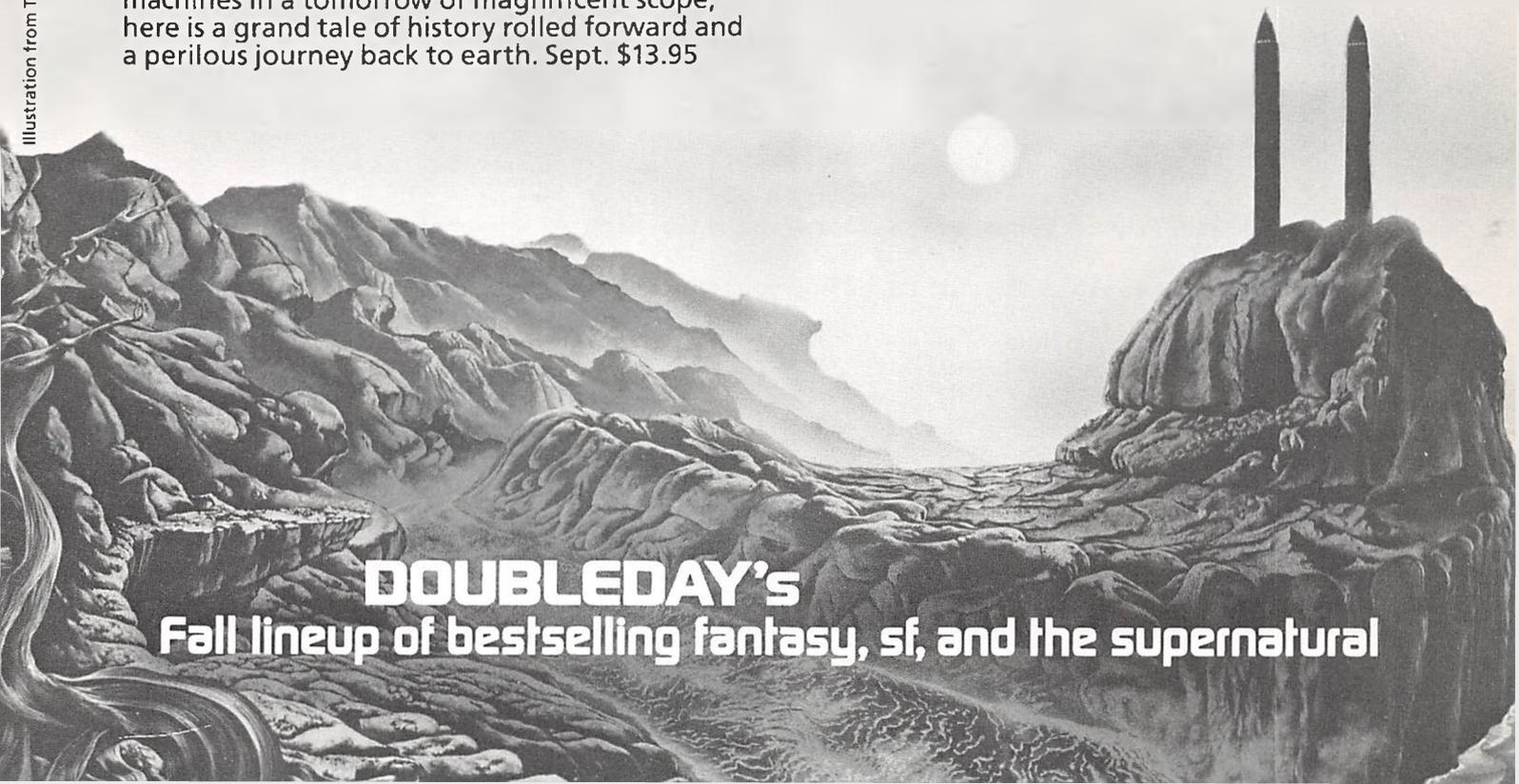
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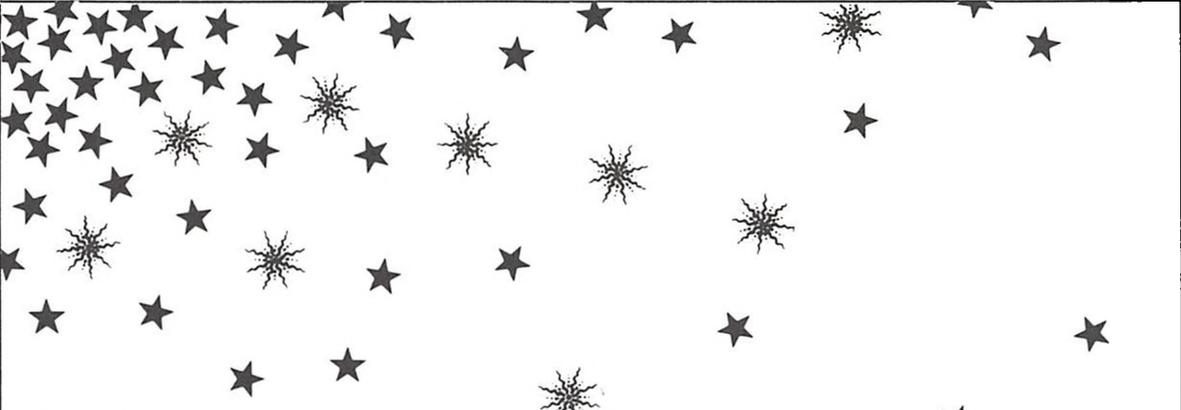
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Sheila Gilbert
Science Fiction and Fantasy Editor

THE SEARCHER AFTER HORROR

by

Robert Bloch

“Searchers after horror haunt strange, far places.”

That’s what H.P. Lovecraft said, and he was right. I know, because it happened to me.

At the age of ten, this particular searcher stumbled upon horror in the bowels of a black bulk looming against the night—the Northwestern Depot, in the strange, far city of Chicago.

It was there, delving amongst the forbidden mysteries hidden in the pages of hundreds of accursed pulp magazines on the newsstand, that I first set eyes on *Weird Tales*.

Moments later, thanks to the generosity of my aunt, I also set hands on a copy.

And so the horror began, as I read my first instalment of the cover story — *The Bride of Osiris*, by Otis Adelbert Kline. A weird enough tale it was, and no mistake, dealing as it did with a secret Egyptian city called Karneter, an ancient realm located here and now, beneath — of all places — Chicago!

Did I believe it?

Yes and no.

In 1927, at the age of ten, I had long since discarded my faith in Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and Calvin Coolidge. But like most members of my peer-group, there were many marvels I’d read about and couldn’t entirely discount.

In a world of silent films and limited local radio communication, a world of primitive pioneer aviation, a world of vast realms still unknown even to explorers, one never was certain as to the exact extent of reality. As a matter of fact, cannibals continued to feast in Africa and New Guinea, defying the vegetarian diet recommended by George Bernard Shaw. Headhunters reduced the per capita of populations in Papua and the Amazon Basin, slave-traders collected “black ivory” in the jungles, voodoo drums thundered in Haiti, and Aleister Crowley

was by no means the only Black Magician practicing his arts in faraway places.

So it was, that like most ten-year-old youngsters in this time and culture, I was of two minds concerning the demarcation between fact and fiction. Common sense might shout “No!” but schizophrenia whispered “Yes,” or at the very least, “Perhaps.”

Perhaps there was a real-life Tarzan swinging through the trees of untravelled tropical forests. Perhaps an actual counterpart of Dr. Fu Manchu plied his profession in Limehouse without fear of malpractice insurance suits. Perhaps there was a Lost World somewhere in the fastnesses of South America, populated by strange prehistoric monsters like the brontosaurus, tyrannosaurus, and Manly Wade Wellman.

I didn’t know, and truth to tell, didn’t care. I simply read and enjoyed.

And *Weird Tales* was the epitome of enjoyment to me. In its pages I discovered, with delight, the work of Wandrei, Long, Howard, Quinn, Clark Ashton Smith and a dozen others. The very names of the authors themselves were exotic and exciting — surely there must be something special about people who identified themselves as Everill Worrell — G.G. Pendarves — Greye La Spina — Nictzin Dyalhis. Just saying those names aloud conjured up visions of sophisticated *literati* seated in the studies of aristocratic manor-houses on the moors, turning out their tales of terror with the aid of quill-pens.

Then there was H.P. Lovecraft.

At many times and in many places I have publicly acknowledged his influence upon me, and my debt to him for his friendship and encouragement. But that came later.

It was Lovecraft who also wrote, “Unhappy is he to whom memories of childhood bring only fear and sadness.” Well, thanks to Lovecraft, my childhood was

different. Who could be unhappy after discovering the world he opened up to readers like myself—the cosmos of Cthulhu, the universe of Yog-Sothoth?

Later in 1927, my family moved to Milwaukee. I paid little attention to that; I was already living in Arkham. By the time I graduated from high school in 1934 there was no question in my mind about going on to college—others might opt for Yale or Harvard, but for me it was Miskatonic University or nothing.

Fortunately, I found myself enrolled almost immediately. Thanks to Lovecraft, with whom I'd begun correspondence in 1933, I'd responded to his suggestion and encouragement by attempting to write horror stories of my own. And, wonder of wonders, just six weeks after graduation, I sold my first story to *Weird Tales*.

Now I was suddenly no longer a freshman at Miskatonic U. At the age of seventeen, I'd joined the faculty!

Although I had yet to meet a real live author in the flesh, I'd already exchanged letters with a number of other faculty-members, thanks to Lovecraft's introduction—August Derleth, Frank Belknap Long, Clark Ashton Smith, E. Hoffmann Price and Henry S. Whitehead, along with several longtime fans who formed part of the "Lovecraft Circle" of correspondents. And I continued my postgraduate studies in the pages of *Weird Tales* itself.

It's not necessary to launch into a history of "The Unique Magazine" or the pulp era in which it flourished. Frankly, it didn't really flourish—"floundered" would be a more accurate appraisal of the circumstances. At a time when the pulp magazine played the role usurped by the paperback book of today, several hundred periodicals made regular monthly, and in some cases even weekly appearances on newsstand racks such as the one I'd encountered in the Northwestern Depot. There were magazines devoted entirely to pirates, railroads, WWI aviator exploits; dozens dealt with detectives and mystery fiction, cowboys and the mythical Wild West, romance and "true confessions". Among the giants were such titles as *Blue Book*, *Argosy*, *Adventure*, *All-Story* and one simply called *Short Stories*. Several had even ventured into the daringly-different realm of science-fiction or science fiction, as it gradually came to be called. And from time to time a few issues of pulp publications offered ghost stories and supernatural sagas, only to perish in the market-place.

Weird Tales didn't die, but it never reached a state of health that would enable it to pass a physical. The constant diagnosis was that of poor circulation.

All sorts of remedies were tried. During the early Thirties its size increased, but not its readership. A constant infusion of new blood took place; Otis Adelbert Kline, who had found a bride for Osiris, now offered another serial, *Tam, Son of the Tiger*. And Seabury Quinn, whose Jules de Grandin series about a phantom-fighting detective was a perennial favorite, introduced a serial featuring his own candidate for marriage, *The Devil's Bride*. Alas, attendance at the wedding didn't come up to expectations.

C.L. Moore came out of nowhere—Indianapolis, to be more specific—with her popular new series character,

Northwest Smith. And Robert E. Howard, acclaimed for his tales of King Kull and the serial *Skullface*, now buckled on his swash to produce the saga of Conan the Barbarian. Conan's exploits were successful, but only with *Weird Tales'* regular readership; it would take the better part of a half-century to come before the barbarian invasion conquered a mass audience.

For a while the magazine was reduced to a bi-monthly status. Its "nude covers" became essential to publication at a time when only the naked truth was tolerated, and naked fiction seemed unseemly.

Nothing helped; the magazine was moribund and its readership wasn't more abundant. Perhaps it was simply a matter of living up to its own motto—"The Unique Magazine" was simply too unique, dealing as it did with fantasy, supernatural horror, science fiction, and subject-matter both modern and archaic. There was too much variety, too great a gap between the literacy of a Lovecraft, the poetic prose of a Clark Ashton Smith, and the heavy-handed hackwork of—never mind naming names, but *Weird Tales* had its share of clunkers too; after all, what could one expect from a market that paid only a penny a word on publication?

But those matters were of little moment to me in 1934. I had sold my first story, then a second, a third, a fourth. By 1935 I was rapidly on my way to becoming a regular contributor. I even had the temerity to kill off my literary mentor, Mr. Lovecraft, in a story called *The Shambler From The Stars*, after rejoicing in his written permission to do so. I dedicated the tale to him, and the following year he would return the compliment in his own story, *The Hunter of The Dark*, disposing of me as a character and immortalizing my name with his generous dedication. Now I'd attained sufficient recognition to attract attention from fans and would-be writers; Earl Peirce, Jr., a fellow-Milwaukeean, came for advice, and I began receiving letters from an aspiring young California amateur named Henry Kuttner. It gradually began to dawn on me that perhaps writing could become my lifetime career, so I'd better start thinking like a professional.

And what do professional writers think about?

Money, that's what.

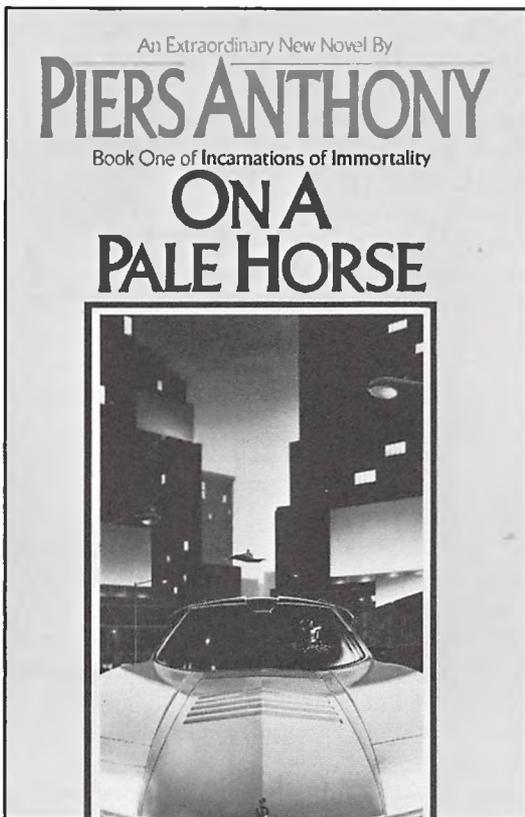
Actually, in 1935, at the height of the Great Depression, almost everybody was thinking about money, or the lack thereof. While a dollar went a lot farther in those days, one had to go a lot farther to get one. My dollars were coming—very slowly and sporadically indeed—from the *Weird Tales* offices in Chicago. I decided to go that far in hopes of speeding their passage my way.

Chicago could be reached in a two-hour trip by rail. I made the journey and arrived at the same Northwestern Depot where I'd first encountered *Weird Tales* eight years earlier. But this time I wasn't interested in a magazine rack; I was looking for a magazine office.

It was a long hike from downtown Chicago's Loop to the near North Side, but I was used to walking, and in those Depression days there were only a fortunate few who could squander fifty cents on cabfare. My feet pounded against the pavement and my heart pounded against my ribs.

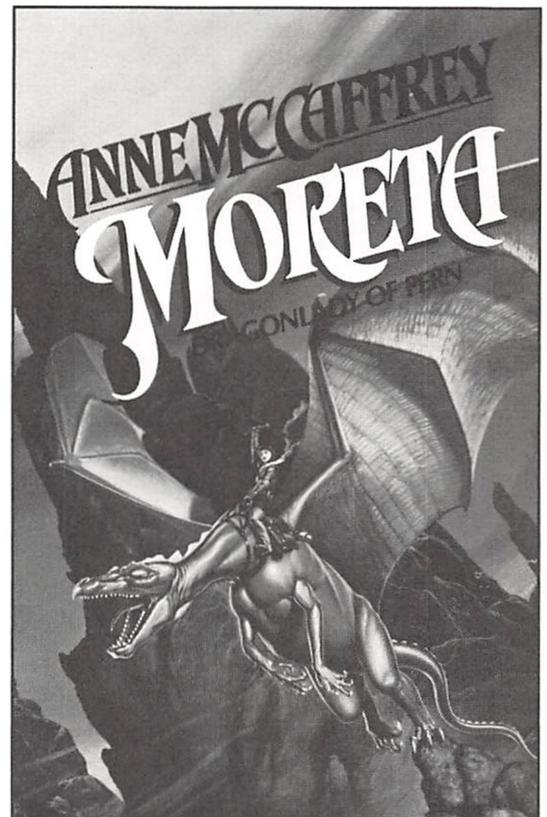
As I halted before the office building at 840 N.

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Michigan Avenue my feet stopped pounding, but my heart continued. And then, when I entered the elevator in the lobby, it made its way into my mouth.

There it remained, as I opened the door of the *Weird Tales* office and blurted out my name to the elderly gentleman—he must have been at least thirty-five—who greeted me there. Brownhaired, with a broad grin matching the smiling eyes framed by his glasses, he introduced himself as Bill Sprenger, the business manager and editorial associate of Farnsworth Wright. His warm, casual congeniality was reassuring, and as my heart slid back down my throat I had a moment in which to assess my surroundings.

The office—identified as the “Editorial Rooms” on early letterheads—seemed somewhat less imposing than I’d imagined it to be. It consisted of a narrow outer reception area, with a desk for a part-time secretary or receptionist, and two inner cubicles—one for William D. Sprenger and the other serving as the domain of Farnsworth Wright.

And now, rising from his desk and moving towards me in the outer offices, I beheld the eminent editor of *Weird Tales* in the flesh.

Bill Sprenger’s presence had proved to be a pleasant surprise, but my first reaction to Farnsworth Wright was that of shock.

I’d never met a real live editor before and didn’t quite know what to expect—certainly I wasn’t prepared for what I saw. A tall, gaunt man in his late forties, his bald head fringed by a close-cut tonsure of grey hair, blue-eyed beneath bushy brows, lower lip pendulous in what seemed to be a perpetual pout, he was not anything like the man I’d pictured in my imagination. His handclasp was limp, his voice faint and high-pitched—and he had palsy.

Was this really the former music critic, the Shakespearean scholar, the erudite editorial intelligence guiding the destinies of “The Magazine of the Bizarre and Unusual”?

It sure as hell was.

And once I’d accustomed myself to the tremor—a symptom of Parkinson’s Disease, seemingly acquired as a result of his service in WWI—I found him to be every bit as cordial and hospitable as Bill Sprenger. The piping voice uttered pleasantries and witticisms, and there wasn’t a hint of condescension towards my eighteen-year-old insignificant self.

Seated before the cluttered desk in his inner office, I listened to his candid explanation of the magazine’s precarious financial position. He spoke with equal candor as to editorial policy, and explained his position regarding the use of nude artwork. While I was—and still am—an admirer of Margaret Brundage’s voluptuous C-cupped ladies, their presence on *Weird Tales* covers disturbed me. I felt that customers in search of the steamy sexuality portrayed on such covers would be turned off by the lack of same in the magazine’s actual content, and that many potential readers of supernatural fantasy would turn away from the covers without ever turning the pages beyond to discover the asexual pleasures of a Lovecraft story.

Wright disagreed; to him the covers constituted the carnival ballyhoo that lured a crowd into the tent. And if there was a hint of sleaziness in the comparison, one had to remember that these were hard times, and any tactics were excusable if they helped keep the show on the road.

Neither of us realized the ironical nature of our argument, sitting in a suite of offices lined with shelves and cupboards containing perhaps a thousand or more back issues of *Weird Tales* from the mid-Twenties through the early Thirties. We were seated in a miniature Fort Knox; those mint-condition magazines would fetch a fortune today, and do so, as any collector can tell you.

But there were no such collectors in 1933, and Wright—I must admit—was right.

He was also a charmer. Gently, he opened my innocent eyes to an awareness of the magazine’s perilous state in the marketplace. He in turn seemed to be aware of what it was like to be a young and struggling writer; if payment was slow, he promised it would always be forthcoming as soon as possible. Would I please bear with him until things got better? What did I think of the work of his latest discovery, artist Virgil Finlay? He’d be doing many illustrations in the future and also some covers; it would be gratifying to see his art adorning my stories—all I had to do was go home and write them. And would I come back again soon for another visit?

I could, and did. Over the next four years I invaded the offices at 840 N. Michigan a dozen times or more. Wright and Sprenger proved surprisingly congenial company; both, I discovered, had a somewhat bawdy sense of humor, concealed beneath their polite demeanors. Often we ended our visits by strolling over to partake of a modest repast at a restaurant on Chicago Avenue which went by the name of The Boston Lunch.

The first time I saw it I burst out laughing and explained that the name seemed quite appropriate, since it reminded me of a Lovecraft story—*Pickman’s Model*—which dealt with Boston gastronomy. A midnight lunch, to be specific. I can see it now; all those ghouls raiding the icebox at the morgue.

And I can see Farnsworth Wright and Bill Sprenger, two gifted and generous gentlemen, valiantly battling to keep *Weird Tales* afloat.

Wright tried anything and everything. Realizing the reader-interest in series characters—Northwest Smith and Jirel of Joiry of C.L. Moore, Quinn’s detective, Jules de Grandin, and Howard’s heroic Conan—he was crushed by Howard’s tragic and untimely death and sought a substitute.

Unfortunately, he never found one. He’d already tried Craig Kennedy, a “scientific detective”, but the sleuth couldn’t solve the mystery of the magazine’s special appeal. And another series character, Doctor Satan, hadn’t come up with a cure.

Lovecraft’s death was also a shocking blow, not only to Wright but to readers and colleagues alike. By this time my California correspondent, Henry Kuttner, had made his own debut in *Weird Tales* and I’d inaugurated his contact with Lovecraft during the last year of HPL’s

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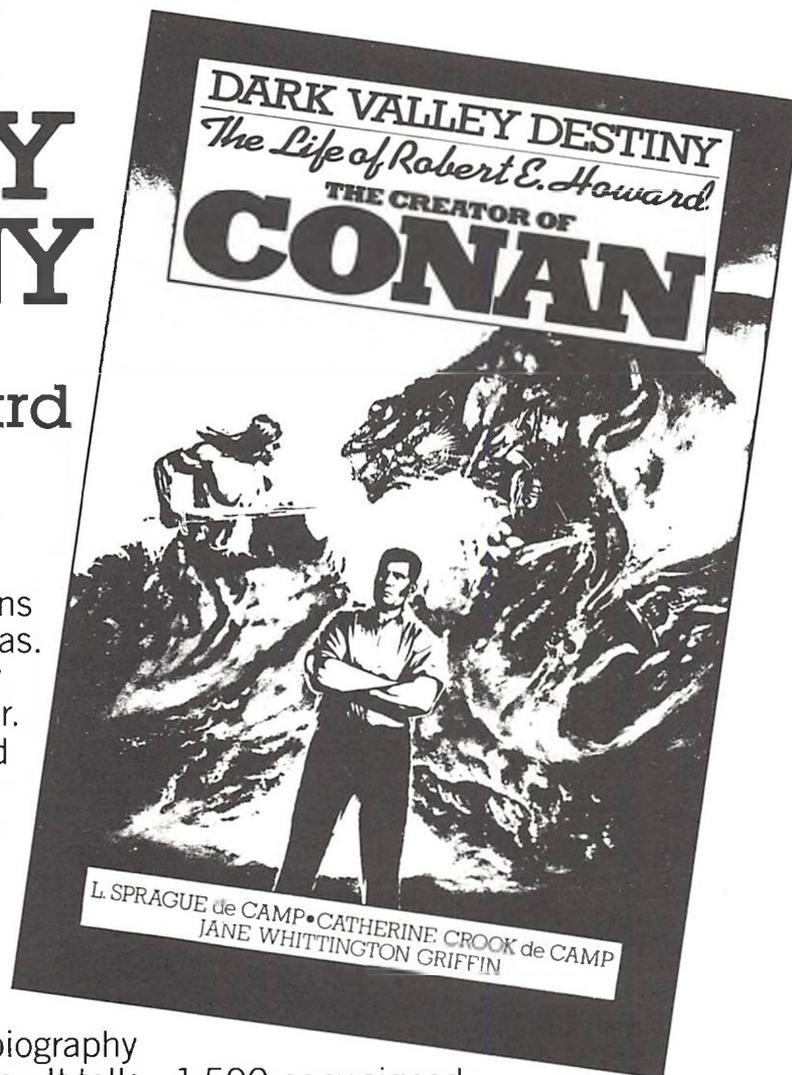
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life. Now, in 1937, Kuttner invited me to visit him in Beverly Hills.

Elsewhere I've written of that journey and my memorable first time meeting with Kuttner, Forrest J. Ackerman, Fritz Leiber and C.L. Moore—the latter vacationing in California at the same time. Sufficient for me to say that I found Miss Moore to be quite captivating; indeed, she so captivated Henry that he married her several years later and began their memorable collaboration. As for Fritz Leiber, he too had been a Lovecraft correspondent and *Weird Tales* fan, and soon he would take his place as a contributor. Ackerman was already a famous monster in his own right, and there were other fan-friends of Henry's whom I met, including Fred Shroyer—destined for a distinguished professorial career—and young artist Jim Mooney.

It was Mooney who helped Henry and I to produce a one-shot, one-copy magazine called *Plump Tales*. A pastiche on you-know-what, Mooney's cover featured a pair of gigantic mammaries designed to give Margaret Brundage an inferiority complex. He also illustrated the contents, which consisted of a dozen raunchy burlesques of the work of Smith, Howard, Quinn, Lovecraft, August Derleth, Edmond Hamilton's "world-wrecking" science fiction and other W.T. regulars. We promptly fired off the result to Farnsworth Wright for his delectation.

God knows where that impudent effort is today; I wish I had it, if only as a memento of more than twenty years' friendship with Henry Kuttner. He was a brilliantly witty man, a remarkably gifted and versatile writer, and a joyous companion. When he came to visit me in Milwaukee I hauled him down forthwith to Chicago and a session with Wright and Sprenger. It was, I believe, the only time they met.

In the early years of his editorship Wright worked with Otis Adelbert Kline, who was then a Chicago resident. So was E. Hoffmann Price, whose contributions to the magazine were an important asset. But they and others gradually drifted away, and while Wisconsinites like Derleth, Ralph Milne Farley and myself paid occasional calls at 840 N. Michigan, Wright—unlike his editorial counterparts in New York, who were surrounded by their contributors—reigned in solitary splendor.

His throne was tottering. So was his health. Bill Sprenger did valiant duty, but forces beyond their mutual control took over. *Weird Tales* was sold to the publishers of *Short Stories* magazine, in a series of complicated financial reshufflings. Its offices were relocated in New York; Wright made the move, but Sprenger stayed behind. In 1940 Wright left his editorial post and died shortly thereafter. Many years were to pass before the magnitude of his importance to the fantasy field was fully recognized.

There is little I can say that would enhance the lustre of his achievements. He was a brave and brilliant man, both as a professional editor and as a private person who gave of himself unstintingly. There are those who may quarrel with his judgement in some matters of policy or editorial preference, but *Weird Tales* stands as a lasting monument to his memory.

The monument is fitting, but it tends to cast a shadow

over Dorothy McIlwraith, who succeeded Wright as editor with Lamont Buchanan as her associate. Many who memorialize the magazine seem willing to dismiss the last dozen years of its existence and imply that its gradual decline was due to editorial ineptitude.

I beg to disagree. Although I met Ms. McIlwraith and Mr. Buchanan only once, early in their tenure, I found them both knowledgeable and discerning in their appraisal of the fantasy fiction field, and our long correspondence over the years confirmed that verdict. But personal opinion aside, it's difficult to fault those responsible for printing the early tales of Ray Bradbury long before he found general favor, plus work by Theodore Sturgeon, Fredric Brown and others destined to go on to greater fame in better-paying markets.

If anything, it was the market situation which was to blame for *Weird Tales'* latterday problems. Even before the move to New York, competition was taking its toll.

Cued by the apparent appeal of sexy covers, two new magazines went a step further and matched their content to them. *Horror Stories* and *Terror Tales* ornamented the newsstands with garish tableaux of half-clad and fully-developed damsels in distress, cowering before the threat of villains stabbing at them with knives, swords, spears, clubs or red-hot poker. You didn't have to be a Sigmund Freud in order to figure out the symbolism of these weapons. The stories were either S&M or—like the unfortunate Israelites of the Book of Genesis—into bondage.

Weird Tales had survived this onslaught, but worse perils loomed. As early as 1932, a rival publication, *Strange Tales*, made an unsuccessful and short-lived attempt to invade the fantasy field. Now, seven years later, *Strange Stories* appeared. Its contents consisted largely of stories which had been rejected by Farnsworth Wright—including, under a number of aliases, quite a few of my own, plus those bearing my name. Many of the *Weird Tales* roster of regular contributors were represented in the lineup; their names, together with a 15¢ price-tag which was later reduced to a mere 10¢, lured the indiscriminating reader.

As Wright's detractors have been quick to point out, his editorial judgement wasn't infallible; a few good yarns did show up in *Strange Stories'* table of contents from time to time. But taken as a whole, the magazine's offerings must stand as a vindication of Wright's literary standards. Within two years his clunker-laden competitor vanished.

Unfortunately, a new contender had taken its place. Street & Smith, a mighty force amongst pulp-publication giants, came out with *Unknown*.

Its appearance spelled trouble for *Weird Tales*, due to a variety of reasons. To begin with, it was edited by the redoubtable John W. Campbell, a mover and shaker in the science fiction field both as the guiding hand of *Astounding* and as a moonlighting professional writer. Campbell had done his homework; he knew the tastes of his readers, many of whom were also fantasy buffs. He also knew the talents of his writers, a formidable array of top professionals whom he'd raised to eminence through careful and conscientious coaching. And—

worst threat of all – while *Strange Stories* had offered a measly ½¢ a word for *Weird Tales* rejects, Campbell was ready, willing and able to pay a princely 2¢ per word for material.

It was the word-rate that did the trick. 1939 was still a part of the Depression Decade, and free-lance writers were still scrambling for survival. Their goal was quantity, not quality; at a time when radio and motion pictures largely ignored their output and few anthologies appeared to reprint fantasy, authors had little incentive to lavish time and care on a story which had a limited life of one month on the newsstands and was then fated to vanish forever. The era of paperback publication, television adaptation and film sales was far in the future and no one could foresee it. Consequently, goaded by immediate economic necessity, the fabricators of fantasy wrote for pay, not for posterity.

And yet they had yearnings; the more conscientious really cared about their craft. Two cents a word brought them the luxury of literacy, and that luxury became a necessity in the face of increased competition for the coveted higher rate.

So Campbell got good stories, and *Unknown* presently adopted a larger format and a new title, *Unknown Worlds*. Flying in the face of Farnsworth Wright's cherished conviction that nude cover art was a bare necessity, the rival publication now offered no cover-art whatsoever; instead it bore the titles and short descriptive blurbs for lead-stories within.

Interior illustrations were often whimsical, and so were the fantasies and border-line science fiction which Campbell favored.

When Dorothy McIlwraith and Lamont Buchanan took over their editorial tasks at *Weird Tales* they found themselves in competition with a magazine that was shrewdly-edited, well-financed, and more widely-distributed than their own vehicle. To compound the problem, *Weird Tales* was no longer unique.

Many of its top contributors – Henry Kuttner, Manly Wade Wellman, Frank Belknap Long, E. Hoffmann Price and the rapidly-rising Fritz Leiber – were assiduously appearing in *Unknown Worlds*. Lesser lights like myself also turned up in there from time to time. To make matters even more difficult, another publishing chain, Ziff-Davis, put out a big fat monthly called *Fantastic Adventures* which cut further into their territory and boasted the bylines of some of *Weird's* one-time regular authors.

The new editors did their damndest to meet the challenge. They deserve a medal for patience, perseverance, and gallantry under fire. As the Forties began they stuck to their guns, trying everything under the sun to survive. The magazine went bi-monthly, its price was cut to 15¢, its interior artwork and format underwent subtle changes, and in the end even the nude covers were abandoned in favor of more fantastic themes which sometimes did not even illustrate a specific feature story within. Alas, nothing seemed to work.

In the end *Weird Tales* was saved by the intervention of a most improbable hero – none other than Adolf Hitler.

Der Fuehrer, together with his Japanese ally, plunged our nation into a war effort which required a careful conservation of natural resources. Pulp-paper rationing was decreed by the government, and the big magazine chains were the first to feel the impact. They solved the supply problem by abandoning publication of their weaker magazines, and *Unknown Worlds* found itself on Street & Smith's casualty-list. Although successful, its profit-return was modest when judged by major publishers' standards, and as such it was expendable.

So *Weird Tales* won a reprieve. For this its editors and readers were duly grateful, and so was I. Although by this time I'd branched out into other fields, there were still certain stories which I felt could find a warmer welcome in the pages of a magazine I'd learned to love. And McIlwraith and her associate gave me even more leeway than Farnsworth Wright; under their aegis I experimented with humorous fantasy, with the Damon Runyon pastiches which eventually evolved into the Lefty Feep series in another publication, with the Thorne Smithsonian *Nursemaid to Nightmares* and *Black Barter*, the offbeat *Hell on Earth*. I'd come a long way from my early Lovecraft-imitations and Egyptian-mythology efforts which Farnsworth Wright favored; now I was doing psychological horror stories like *Enoch*, even a *One Way To Mars* in the modern style of Cain and Chandler. It was under the new regime that I wrote *Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper*, plus many of the stories which – unbeknownst to me at the time – were to be translated to television or film and reprinted in anthologies and collections here and abroad.

And it was in *Weird Tales* that I perpetrated an observation which come back to haunt me when quoted – or misquoted – for over forty years. Writing a brief autobiographical note in *The Eyrie* letter column, I told the readers that I wasn't really a monster. "Deep down inside, I have the heart of a small boy. I keep it in a jar, on my desk."

When 1945 rolled around, my ties to *Weird Tales* were strengthened when the magazine lent its name and approval to a syndicated radio series, *Stay Tuned For Terror*, in which I adapted thirty-nine of my stories for broadcasting in the United States, Canada and Hawaii. The bulk of these stories had appeared in *The Magazine of the Bizarre and Unusual* and now – like my *Ripper* yarn, which had turned up on a number of radio shows – their life had been miraculously renewed. Soon other renewals occurred: August Derleth's and Donald Wandrei's specialty-publishing venture, Arkham House, began reprinting stories and collections by *Weird Tales* writers, starting with Lovecraft and continuing with many others, myself included. In their wake some of the major publishers began to put out anthologies, and the era of paperback reprint speeded the revival. Then came television, and the deluge.

It was in truth a miracle, but not for *Weird Tales*. As the Forties waned, another threat waxed. *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* appeared, edited by that dazzling duo, Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas. While its editorial acumen sparked inspiration for a whole new crop of fantasy writers, it also borrowed

heavily from the ranks of one-time *Weird Tales* contributors, and its emphasis on modern style and themes attracted readers. Accompanying its arrival was the sudden boom in science fiction which produced a score of digest-sized magazines, many of which offered fantasy stories as well as straight sf fare. Add to this the growing audience for television, and the fate of *Weird Tales* was all too predictable. The penny-a-word days were over.

The end came in 1954, but let's not linger at the funeral. Sufficient to say that longtime readers mourned its passing, and longtime contributors like myself felt even greater sadness. Now, it seemed, we had only our memories. Even the fortunate few who had managed to preserve a collection of copies found that the old pulp-paper stock was flaking away and the magazine spines were weakening almost as pitifully as those of their owners.

Sic transit Gloria Vanderbilt, as we Latin scholars say. I looked back on my own association with *Weird Tales*—as a childhood fan, an adolescent aspiring author, a writer represented seventy times in its pages, including several pseudonymous instances and collaborations. To this magazine I owed deep gratitude, not only for starting me out on a professional career but for granting me the friendship of so many who remained near and dear to me always.

But one can't live in the past, and now I must face the future. In the ensuing twenty years I continued to write, moved to Hollywood, and contented myself with the opportunities afforded in adapting a score or more of my old *Weird Tales* stories to film and TV for a new audience. Various attempts to revive the magazine met with failure, and I took consolation in the fact that the resurrection and recycling of my yarns proved a practical method of preserving a hint of the long-ago and far-away.

Then, as fate would have it, in 1975 I found myself appearing as guest of honor at the First World Fantasy Convention—and suddenly *Weird Tales* came alive again.

For lo and behold, the Convention city was Providence, Rhode Island, Lovecraft's beloved home. At long last I was privileged to visit the sites where he'd lived, and pay my respects at the grave where he rested. For good measure, as recipient of the Convention's first lifetime career award, I came away with Gahan Wilson's sculptured bust of Lovecraft himself.

Crowning my joy was the opportunity to meet and mingle with other fans and readers whose names had sparkled in the letter-columns of *Weird Tales* in bygone years. Now they were palpable presences, along with colleagues I'd never dreamed of meeting. Here was Manly Wade Wellman whose first story I'd read as a child of ten—Frank Belknap Long and H. Warner Munn, whose contributions came even earlier—the ineffable Forrest Ackerman and Joseph Payne Brennan, another contributor I'd not previously encountered. Here too was my lifelong friend Fritz Leiber, with a reading of *The Haunter of the Dark*. It was a strange feeling to hear that story read aloud; a story Lovecraft dedicated to me, and in which I was the principal character who came to this very city to meet a dire fate. Hearing it in these surroundings I almost convinced myself that I must be dead—but no, I was very much alive.

And with this realization came another: *Weird Tales* would never die. We who formed a part and parcel of its existence might meet our mortal endings but in a variety of incarnations and reincarnations, *Weird Tales* lives on.

It lives in the continuing annual conventions which immortalize imagination. It lives in the work of Lovecraft and his contemporaries, neglected during their lifetimes but raised to rightful regard today. It lives in the films and teleplays and recordings derived from its contents. It lives in literally thousands of collections and anthologies here and throughout the world which have reprinted stories appearing in its pages.

Much of the favored fiction of the past has vanished, seemingly forever. Gone are the glories of once-popular periodicals which once ruled over the magazine-racks in all their slick-paper splendor. The literary luminaries, idols of the intelligentsia who granted them fame and favor with the critics, are for the most part forgotten, along with the very titles of the publications in which they proudly appeared. But the humble, lowly and despised pulp magazine which made no pretensions other than to offer entertainment is still very much with us, influential and alive. It has inspired an entire generation of new and younger writers to carry on its traditions, so that future searchers after horror may not seek in vain.

Today, as always, *Weird Tales* remains truly, "The Unique Magazine."

WORLD OF WEIRD, 1931 - 1932

by

Jack Williamson

NOTE: This is Chapter 11 of an attempt at autobiography, *When Wonder Was*, recently completed and still in search of a publisher.

America's faith in progress and endless prosperity had been soaring high. In 1929, Time had hailed Walter P. Chrysler as "Man of the Year"; he had introduced the Plymouth, bought Dodge Brothers, and begun the world's tallest building. In honor of Edison, Henry Ford sponsored a "Golden Jubilee" to celebrate the fiftieth birthday of the electric light. By September, at the crest of the economic wave, optimistic investors owed their brokers eight billion dollars.

October came. "Black Tuesday." The stock market crash. Yet, even in the face of social failure, science and technology kept on climbing. Clyde Tombaugh discovered Pluto in 1930. The Institute for Advanced Studies was founded at Princeton. Dry ice and frozen foods appeared that year, and photoelectric cells began opening doors by invisible magic.

I was hardly hurt for another year or two, even though the file cards for the winter of 1930-31 show long strings of dismal defeats in the fight to stay alive. "The Crimson Cross" was rejected by *Weird Tales* and *Ghost Stories*. "The Ozark Horror" had too much of Lovecraft. "Tarantula!" and "The Black Pearl" I've totally forgotten. Every rejection another cruel blow, yet I kept on trying.

In 1931, I broke into *Weird Tales*.

"The Unique Magazine"! It was really unique. Along with the ghost stories and werewolf stories and vampire stories, it ran science fiction, tagged "weird-scientific." Though printed on pulp paper, it was a far call from any other pulp—even from *Strange Tales*, which Clayton brought out in imitation of it. Farnsworth Wright, the man who made and kept it unique, was one of the

greatest editors I've known, and *Weird* became one more new world, infused with its own alluring witchery.

At Clayton, Harry Bates was still paying a quick two cents a word, and I spent most of April on "Wolves of Darkness," a first-draft novelette aimed at him. His check for \$500 reached me on May 27, with a three-word note, "God is love." Five hundred dollars! A small fortune in my world then, with the dollar worth perhaps ten times what it is today.

It ran in *Strange Tales*, with a cover I loved. A nearly nude girl is kneeling in the snow, her bare arms around two snarling, green-eyed wolves. I was proud of the story then. Recently, looking at it again, I found it well-plotted, fast-moving, and pretty effective on its own basic level.

What struck me hardest, though, is the contrast with Stephen King's powerful shocker, "The Mist," which gets so much more from a very similar story idea. In 1931, I still had a lot to learn.

I had finished two more stories before that check came. "The Lady of Light" was another novelette, far less successful. In "Wolves of Darkness," the light-fearing aliens invade the world I knew; I recall taking long walks at night while I was plotting it, tramping over the moonlit prairie with hard-crusting snow crunching underfoot and far-off coyotes howling.

"The Lady of Light" had no such links to reality. Bates rejected it; *Argosy* found it "not our type"; Farnsworth Wright called it unconvincing. Sold finally to *Amazing* for \$125, it did get a cover. No more memorable than the story.

"The Pygmy Planet" was 9000 words. Harry Bates paid \$192 for it, and ran it in *Astounding* with a striking Wesso cover that showed the tiny planet hanging in the laboratory. The idea was new, at least to me—the

basketball-sized artificial world whose days are our seconds—but I did too little with it. All I knew enough to care about was the sale, the cover, and the letters from readers happy with the story just as it was.

Edmond Hamilton was my first and best friend in Wright's exciting little world. Rich again, with those two checks, I agreed to meet him in Minneapolis for a trip down the Mississippi. He was four years older than I and two years ahead into print, his first sale to *Weird Tales* made in 1926. Though we had been writing since I got his address from Jerry Siegel, we had never met. Mark Twain had filled us both with the history and romance of the river, but I don't think either of us had ever rowed a boat.

We had a good deal in common. First of all, an early worship of A. Merritt. Ed's first story, like my own, was modeled on Merritt's "The People of the Pit." We were near enough the same age, both college dropouts living on what we could earn from science fiction, with no desire to do anything else.

Ed had more confidence and polish than I, but I think we were equally ignorant and apprehensive of sex. We seldom talked about women, but he saw them as predators, marriage as a dangerous trap—he hadn't yet met Leigh Brackett. His great love was books; he read and remembered everything, history and biography and travel, even obscure poetry, as well as fantastic fiction.

He was almost the perfect pulpster. The stories he wrote then were strongly plotted and action-packed, hammered out at white heat and never revised. Typing with two fingers and sharing all the tensions his heroes felt, he was jabbing the keys so hard when he came to a climax that o's cut holes in the paper.

His readers caught the excitement. He was already perhaps the most popular and most prolific *Weird Tales* writer, and I think his work deserves more attention than the new critics give it. His ideas were often original, sometimes epic. His stories of the Interstellar Patrol were the pioneer space operas, in print well ahead of Doc Smith and John Campbell and Olaf Stapledon.

Such stuff wasn't literature or meant to be. In those days it wasn't reprinted, and pulp paper itself was nearly as ephemeral as a strolling minstrel's chant. Written for the audience and the moment, Ed's early stories were crudely melodramatic, careless of style and fact and character, nearly all fitted to the same save-the-world formula.

Sad faults now, but editors and readers wanted no more then. Farnsworth Wright bought forty stories before there was a rejection, or even a request for revision—though Ed kept enclosing return postage with each new submission.

The man was far more complex and interesting than most of his output. Now and then, even in the early thirties, he turned from the pulp formula to far more sensitive and serious work—which was often harder to sell. He got a lot of polish from Leigh after their marriage; his later fiction shows far more care with style and mood and character.

Yet his old pulp skills still served him well, even the

magazines themselves had given way to comic books. For two more decades, in spite of all his grumbling, Mort Weisinger and Julie Schwartz kept him busy grinding out fast-action formula-fitted scripts for Superman and Batman.

For many years, in spite of occasional tensions, he was my nearest friend. "Thin, dark and wiry"—in his own words—pounding "all day on the typewriter, setting down the feverish visions that filled his head—visions of wonders to come, of great dooms sweeping down on the hapless Earth." He balanced his romanticism with a sardonic sense of humor often directed at stupidities, sometimes my own. A great talker, best of all about the books he knew. I learned a lot by listening.

We met that summer in a Minneapolis hotel room. We had planned, or at least he had, to buy a houseboat and drift down the river. An impractical dream. We soon gave it up and settled for a fourteen-foot skiff with an outboard motor and rather too much camping gear. Ed insisted that we wear golf knickers; I agreed though they looked ridiculous to me and I think to the river people.

Equipped with a navigational guide and a whistle for the locks, happily unaware of all we didn't know, we set out to follow the channel markers down to the sea. We steered close to the first boat we met, gawking up at it till the bow wave bounced us high. We nearly went under the slanting bow of a barge, Aground in shallow water, we broke shear pins. Our first motor failed. But we learned the river and kept on going.

On the scenic upper river we camped on the banks. Farther down, with the levees grown higher than the land and nothing to see but the willow fringes, camping lost its charm. We shipped the gear home and put up at Y.M.C.A.'s in the river towns. The days on the water grew long; Ed used to fill them with summaries of the books he had read and talk of his life and the *Weird Tales* people he had met.

At Fort Madison, we looked up Ted Sloat, a fellow science fictioneer, who tended bar at the Elk's Club. He introduced us to his patrons, mostly retired railroad men, and took us to tour the state penitentiary. We spent several days at Hannibal, recalling Mark Twain and rediscovering Huck Finn's cave. Out of Vicksburg, our second motor failed.

We were ten days there waiting for repairs to come from New Orleans. We met a bootlegging riverman who kept his stock in trade in jugs hung on bailing wire, sunk under the two-holer at the end of his shantyboat. One day we rode a mail and trading boat up the Yazoo, with a final stop at an illicit still in the river jungle.

The spare parts never came. We sold the boat and took the Tennessee Belle, back upriver to Arkansas and then down again to New Orleans. A rich treat for both of us. The pilots were old river men who let us roam the boat and lounge with them in the Texas, listening to tales that could have come from Twain himself.

E. Hoffmann Price was living in New Orleans then. Ed had met him, I think at the *Weird Tales* office in Chicago, and we looked him up. Born in 1898, Price was older than we and already a veteran pulpster, with "The

Rajah's Gift" sold to *Weird* in 1924. The man seems eternal; even now, in the 1980's, he still drives cars across the continent and writes fine fantasy novels.

Married, working for Union Carbide to support his wife and child, he impressed me (in spite of them) as the first real live soldier of fortune I had known. A West Pointer, he had served in the Philippines, on the Mexican border and in France with the A.E.F. Exuding romance, he was a connoisseur of exotic food and drink, a collector of Oriental rugs, a student of Arabic and a friend of Turks and Chinese.

We stayed in town a week or two, sleeping while he worked, exploring the city with him, regaled every night with his adventures and his liquor. He seemed to need no sleep.

Homeward bound. I saw the rest of the river from a freighter that finally steamed up across the Texas prairie through the ship canal to Houston. There I found Kirk Marhburn, another writer friend of Price's, an unhappy individual haunted with the same romanticism but without his unquenchable vitality.

Trapped at some dull job in a railway office, he was drinking too much and writing well polished vampire tales for *Weird*. We kept in touch for a time; in the letters I saved, he is chiding me gently for the stylistic sloppiness of my first-draft fiction and lamenting his own failure to make *Strange Tales*—Harry Bates said he "wrote too well."

I don't remember when I got home to New Mexico, but by October I had finished two more stories. Bates bought "Salvage in Space" for \$160. "The Moon Era" was a first-draft novelette; I remember hammering out 27 pages of it in one day after the spell of the story had captured me. My record stint.

It derived from S. Fowler Wright's far future fantasy "The World Below," which Ed Hamilton had told me about. *Astounding* was running into trouble, but *Wonder Stories* bought it, to run in the February issue with a different last paragraph—in my not-very-logical ending, the first-person narrator had died with his story not yet told to anybody.

In January I wrote "Red Slag of Mars," a novelette remotely suggested by an entry in a Hugo Gernsback contest, and written for a promised half cent a word. "The Electron Flame" was an experimental effort to translate Poe's "Purloined Letter" into science fiction. Gernsback printed it on slick paper, but his checks had quit coming.

Weird Tales was paying a full cent a word, rather more reliably. I had been reading it, or trying to, for several years, caught up sometimes in its exotic spell, sometimes bewildered by arcane supernatural rites I couldn't believe or understand, sometimes turned off by stuff that looked simply bad. Though it had rejected several stories, I felt closer to it now, since I knew Ed and Price and Mashburn.

I tried again in January with "The Wand of Doom." It was a short novelette, the background drawn from our river trip. The hero builds a machine that turns mental images to solid matter. His dreams turn real. One of them

is a nightmare. Wright took the story after a bit of revision, and his readers praised it.

Golden Blood was a more ambitious project—a serial I hoped to place with *Argosy*, which still paid several cents a word. I must have begun it soon after I got home from New Orleans, because the hero was a soldier of fortune named for Price and the story takes him to exotic Arabia.

Most of the world was stranger then in those far days before antibiotics, easy air travel and instant photography. Far lands were mysterious to most of us, dangerous but alluring. For all anybody really knew, some hidden remnant of a lost race might be surviving in the quarter-million square miles of the Rub' al-Khali.

I had never been there; my background was from Lawrence's *Revolt in the Desert* and George Allan England's *Flying Legion*, with detail from a few travel books and the deserts that I knew in America. I compiled a little dictionary of what I thought was Arabic, and observed my sister's cat as a model for the golden tiger.

Argosy serials were done in six installments, each ten thousand words long and building up to some cliff-hanger. I did my best to fit that pattern. I had begun to realize, too, that my quick first drafts weren't always good enough. I remember rewriting most of the novel, working by kerosene lamp through long winter nights in the living room after the rest of the family was in bed.

Argosy rejected it, though, with a kind comment on "the nice color." Wright accepted it and ran it with two lovely covers by J. Allan St. John, the able artist who used to illustrate Edgar Rice Burroughs. Wright's letter about the first painting was another breath of wonder.

"I've just seen the rough color-sketch . . . that colossal golden tiger looming gigantic against the sky . . . and in the foreground Price and Fouad sitting astride their white camels and looking quite Lilliputian by comparison. . . . What a gorgeous splash of color—the golden yellow tiger, the vivid green of Vakyra's robe and the intense crimson of Malikar's garment. Allah!" He added that St. John had stayed up half the night to finish reading the story and persuaded him to order another cover for the second installment.

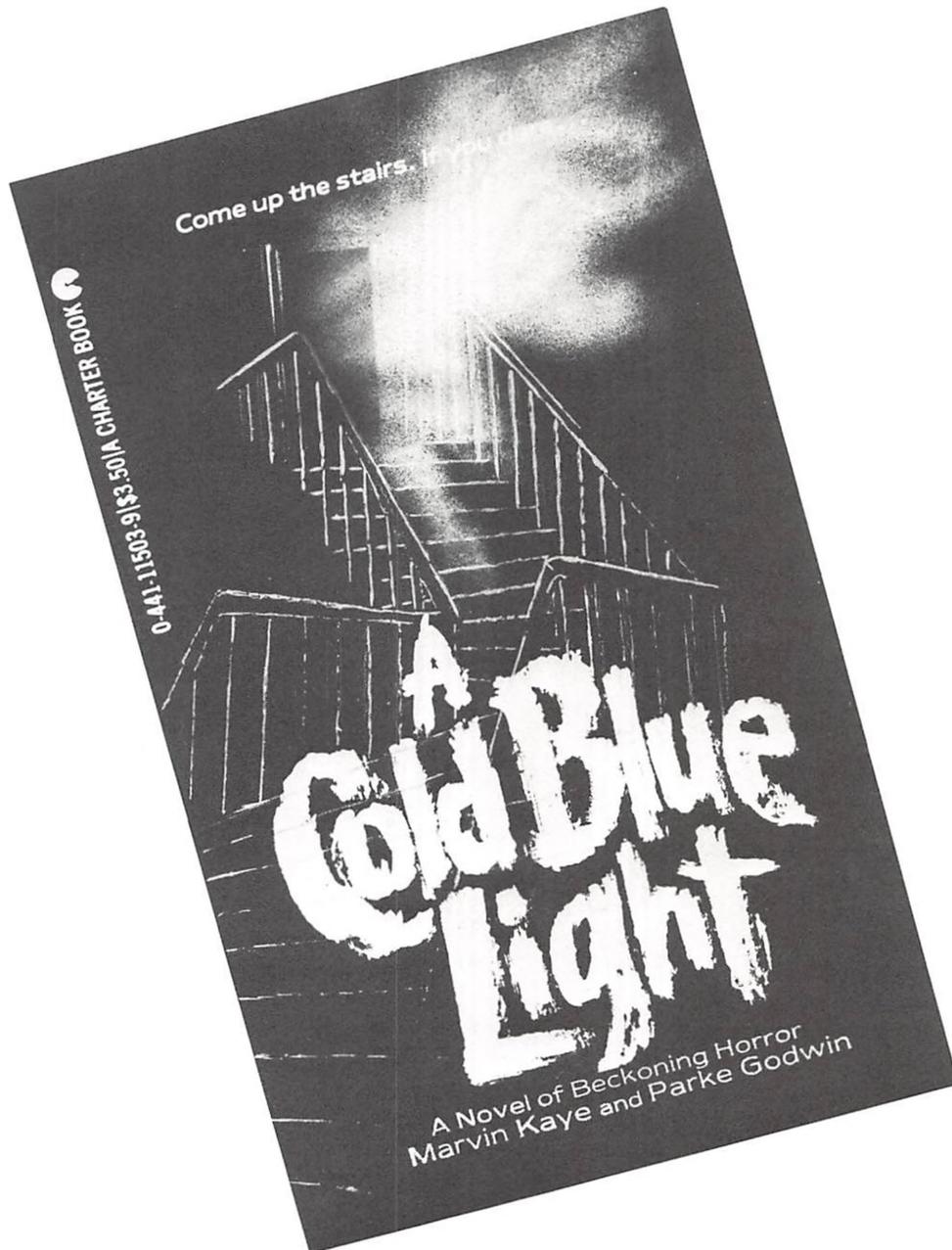
In Chicago with Ed Hamilton a year or two later I called at the *Weird Tales* office—840 North Michigan, an address I'll never forget—and met Wright himself. A great editor, as remarkable as his magazine. He was already poker-faced and trembling from the disease that finally killed him—a medical friend called it "post-encephalitic Parkinsonism" when I told him about it.

Wright was a tall quiet man with an unexpected earthy wit. A frustrated Shakespearean scholar, he once published a pulp-paper edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with illustrations by Virgil Finlay and notes of his own. The first volume of Wright's Shakespeare Library. There was no second volume.

The high point of that visit was a dinner given by Otis Adelbert Kline, another member of the *Weird Tales* clan, I suppose in honor of Ed and me. We met Bill Sprenger and others; Bill was the friendly chap who got the checks out from *Weird*. Kline was running a reading-fee literary

(continued on page 59)

*What haunts you
at Aubrey House . . .*



. . . depends on what you fear the most.

A COLD BLUE LIGHT

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THE MOST POPULAR STORIES IN WEIRD TALES 1924 TO 1940

WITH STATISTICS AND ANALYTICAL COMMENTARY

by

Sam Moskowitz

The most popular story ever to appear in *Weird Tales* magazine under the editorship of Farnsworth Wright was *The Woman of the Wood* by A. Merritt, the cover story of the August, 1926 issue. Wright said so in the magazine, in person and in letters. Also when it was reprinted in the January, 1934 issue it won first place.

No one denies that it was a wonderful story. The tale, of trees of a forest in France, which enlist the aid of the American McKay, in saving them from destruction at the axes of the Polleau family of woodmen, is a masterpiece of symbolism in both its beauty and terror. The previously unanswered question was; what basis did Farnsworth Wright have for elevating this one story over everything else he had printed, other than a subjective conclusion?

Farnsworth Wright had become editor of *Weird Tales* in fact with its November, 1924 issue. Starting with that issue, he incorporated a procedure which had been utilized by *Adventure Magazine* previously of keeping a record of the popularity of individual stories and later publishing the titles of the favorites. His method of accomplishing the scoring was to keep a running count of those stories favorably commented upon in letters to him. This meant that anywhere from one to a dozen story votes could be counted from a single letter. Each vote carried the same weight, whether a reader thought the

story was the best, second best or third best in an issue, providing it was liked. Negative votes were also counted, though they were not deducted from those that were positive.

The Merritt story received 101 votes. No other story in the magazine's history under Wright's editorship received that many votes. His system permitted him to rate it against all the others.

The votes for every issue were kept on individual file cards, orange in color. These cards were held by Wright's wife, Marjorie, after he died. Later she gave to them to Fred Shroyer, old-time fan, collector, academic, author and reviewer. They were purchased from him by the book and magazine dealer Richard Minter and then sold to me.

Aside from Minter's assurance, I knew the cards were authentic when I bought them, for I had examined *Weird Tales'* card files in the past with their fading orange color and the familiar typewriter face. For further confirmation I wrote to Shroyer, resident in Monterey Park, California. He replied December 31, 1980: "I'm delighted that you have acquired the Farnsworth Wright WT cards; they belong with the rest of the files you have . . . Marjorie moved from Palm Desert — where I met her — in 1965 to be closer to her son and family. I've had no word from her in the last several years, and I think it must be presumed

that she is dead. Incidentally, I bought her house there when she left. She gave me a hoard of FW mementoes, and a number of WTs, many of them bound, that had belonged to FW."

Anyone owning all the Farnsworth Wright issues of *Weird Tales*, could assemble a list of the most popular stories as published each month in the magazine. The advantage of the cards is several fold. First, they supply the account of *all* stories rated, not just the winner. Secondly, the winners were announced after Wright had received replies no more than 30 days. The cards show the late votes, after the magazine had gone to press, and they frequently change the winner. The results shown here are the true totals; those in *Weird Tales* were often preliminary. There were times when Farnsworth Wright announced an almost three-way tie, saying that it was impossible to tell the difference. The cards show no such situation and seems to indicate that Wright was being politic for his own reasons.

There were issues where the most popular story received only eight votes. This indicated a weakness true of all systems, even national elections. In *Weird Tales'* case, not enough people were inspired to write letters that month. The last issue Wright started to rate was January-February, 1940. He had all the titles in the issue typed out on a card, but no totals were ever filled in.

Obviously, these card files do not list the most popular stories prior to November, 1924 when Edward Baird was editor. Factually, Baird did not edit the first Anniversary June-July-August, 1924 issue, though many of the stories in it were purchased by him. Otis Adelbert Kline and Farnsworth Wright threw it together, but Jacob Clark Henneberger was the acting editor who supervised them and even selected stories, this according to Farnsworth Wright.

We do not know how such successful stories in those rated issues as *The Rats in the Walls*, *The Picture in the House* and *The Hound* all by H.P. Lovecraft would have fared; or *The Phantom Farmhouse*, Seabury Quinn's first *Weird Tales* story; nor Francis Stevens *Sunrise* or Austin Hall's *The People of the Comet*. That was a time when the key figures in the creation and continuation of *Weird Tales* were in an agony of economic travail, indecision and change. Events had them alternating between optimistic planning and utter despair.

A companion magazine to *Weird Tales* was so far advanced in the planning stage that office stationary for it already existed. The title was *Ghost Stories*. This was to appear immediately after the June-July-August, 1924 issue of *Weird Tales* and would have been under the aegis of the Rural Publishing Corp. This is not to be confused with *Ghost Stories* magazine issued by Bernard McFadden beginning July, 1926.

Farnsworth Wright in letters to authors claimed that *Weird Tales* was \$60,000 in debt. *Detective Tales*, its companion magazine, was in the black, so it was sold to J.M. Lansinger. Edward Baird, the editor of *Weird Tales* up to that point, went with it. Baird appeared to have an interest in *Detective Tales*, because he remained very much the head of it through the twenties and into the thirties. The various statements of ownership pub-

lished in the magazine bear this out. The corporate name was The Collegiate Publishing Company. Before the transition occurred, the name of the publication had been changed from *Detective Tales* to *Real Detective Tales & Mystery Stories* with the May, 1924 issue. The reason given was an alleged law suit by Street & Smith's *Detective Story Magazine* for infringement on their title. It also later published western stories.

By July, 1924, it appeared almost certain that no more issues of *Weird Tales* would appear beyond the Anniversary issue. Farnsworth Wright began returning manuscripts to the authors and worked at getting backing for a magazine of his own. At first he contemplated issuing one with the title *Weird Story Magazine*. Then, he decided that *Weird Tales* had such a bad name that the word "weird" in the title might hurt it. He then was very optimistic about interesting backers in a magazine to be titled *Strange Tales*, "A Magazine of the Bizarre and Unusual". His plan was to feature pseudo-science stories or science fiction (the term had not been invented yet), but to use other types of fantastic stories if they were of outstanding merit. He intended his first issue to be dated January, 1925 and reach the newstands by December 5, 1924. His enthusiasm reached substantial proportions as he contemplated a "rock-bottom" circulation of 70,000 copies and 150,000 by the fourth issue. (Henneberger claimed an 81,000 copy sale on a 150,000 print order at 50 cents on the Anniversary issue as his peak sales.)

Wright's ambitious plans faded before the reality that the banks were not prepared to advance him any substantial sum of money without collateral and no track record of publishing performance. Then Henneberger agreed to place *Weird Tales* in the hands of the printer, Cornelius of the Cornelius Printing Company, 2457-59 Washington Street, Indianapolis, Indiana. With the transfer went an agreement that Farnsworth Wright would be hired as editor and W.R. Sprenger as business manager at \$50.00 a week each. Wright was glad to accept the offer, the move to Indianapolis being no great inconvenience since he was at the time unmarried and living in a hotel room.

It is in Indianapolis that the story of the ratings begins. The first winning story, ever, in *Weird Tales* was *The Brain in the Jar* by Norman Elwood Hammerstrom and Richard F. Searight. It received 24 votes to beat out the cover story *Teoquiltla the Golden* by Ramon de las Cuevas which received 18. Hammerstrom was then living at 107 Seminary St., Galesburg, Ill. and Searight at 20,000 Derby Ave., Detroit, Mich. This distance between them left open the method of collaboration. They were paid \$35.00 for the 5,000 word story.

The story tells of an Allied spy during World War I who is captured by the Germans and turned over to one of their leading experimental surgeons. He removes the brain and eyes of the spy and keeps them alive in a small glass container. The brain develops the power to levitate objects and influence the movements of men. Through the latter it causes his story to be written out and through the former he kills the doctor who has been responsible for his present position. The story is adequately told, little more. Later talking head stories like *The Talking Brain* by M.H. Hasta (*Amazing Stories*, August, 1926),

The Head by Joe Kleier (*Amazing Stories*, August, 1928) and *The Eternal Professors* by David H. Keller, M.D. (*Amazing Stories*, August, 1929) were obviously derivative of the experiment of the famed Russian physiologist Ivan Petrovich Pavlov and his associates on dogs. Whether *The Brain in the Jar* was similarly inspired can only be conjectured, but the listed trio of stories in a magazine with a much larger circulation than *Weird Tales*, vitiated the uniqueness of impact it may have had to *Weird Tales* readers in 1924.

When *Weird Tales* reprinted it in the June, 1936 issue it received only five votes for fifth place but that still was enough to beat out Edmond Hamilton writing as Hugh Davidson and August W. Derleth.

Searight additionally authored a badly overwritten story, *The Sealed Casket*, in March, 1935 *Weird Tales*, of a schemer who left a sealed, ancient casket in the will of a scientist whose wife he was conducting an affair with, who is crushed and drained of blood by an invisible creature released when the casket is opened. *The New World*, a science fiction poem describing the shaping of a distant planet; and *The Wizard's Death* in August, 1936, effectively relating the last thoughts of a wizard waiting to pay his debt to "The Lord of Darkness" for the evil powers granted him during his life time.

Searight also sold at least one other story, *Cosmic Horror* which appeared in *Wonder Stories*, August, 1933. It was about a nearly indestructable, blood-sucking alien entity from outer space, that generates enough electricity to incinerate any human it comes in touch with. The title and plot of this story seems to indicate that it was originally intended for *Weird Tales*. In this respect it should be pointed out that Hugo Gernsback in his various magazines consistently printed scientifically-based horror stories including examples by H.P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith and David H. Keller, M.D.

The cover novelette that Hammerstrom and Searight beat out for first place in the November, 1924 issue *Teoquitla the Golden*, an adventure story attributed to one Ramón de las Cuevas was actually written by M.R. Harrington of 10940 Sepulveda Boulevard, San Fernando, Calif. who received \$160 for its 16,000 words. This was in interesting contrast to Hammerstrom and Searight who were paid a little more than half cent a word for their effort. No further stories appeared from Cuevas/Harrington or, for that matter, Hammerstrom, whose contribution may have been primarily in supplying the idea. The *Teoquitla* story which received 18 votes tells of an explorer who rapes an Aztec girl and in punishment is given a sex change into a golden-haired beauty and married to Montezuma by a Protestant minister.

During July, 1924, Farnsworth Wright began returning manuscripts still in the offices of *Weird Tales*, including manuscripts already accepted. The magazine was faced with bankruptcy, Edwin Baird was no longer on the premises and many of the submitted stories already had pages missing that could not be found. Among the stories he returned was *A Nightmare of the Lakes* by Frank Belknap Long, Jr. This was Long's second story. Wright had previously accepted *The Desert Lich* which appeared in the Anniversary issue. He liked Long's work

because of a distinctive richness of style which separated him from the run-of-the-mill practitioner.

H.P. Lovecraft was responsible for Long selling to *Weird Tales*. He arranged for Henneberger to transmit *The Desert Lich* and a detective story to editor Edwin Baird. The detective story was accepted, set in type, but then the galleys returned to Long when *Detective Tales* changed ownership. *The Desert Lich* was transferred to Farnsworth Wright who accepted it for *Weird Tales*.

When Wright nailed down the editorship of *Weird Tales*, he asked for *A Nightmare of the Lakes* back from Long, changed the title to *Death Waters* and featured it on the cover of the December, 1924 issue. It took first place but only by a total of nine votes! It was quite an effectively written story of a lake almost solid with snakes and the misused black guide who summons them en masse to attack the intruding whites.

Another point of interest about the December, 1924 issue was a 1,500 word story by Denis Francis Hannigan of 16 Howell Street, Rochester, N.Y. titled *Afterward*. It concerned a murderer who meets his victim in the hereafter and makes up with him. In the old British publication *The Ludgate Monthly*, I had run across several science fiction tales by a D.F. Hannigan, one of which, *Old Doctor Rutherford*, I had reprinted in my anthology *Science Fiction by Gaslight* (World, 1968). Both authors had the uncommon name of D.F. Hannigan, but upon rereading them I am convinced they are two completely different persons.

The cover story of the January, 1925 issue of *Weird Tales* was *Invaders from the Outside* by J. Schlossel. As the title suggests, this was a space opera of the penetration of our solar system by an interstellar planet, whose two-legged inhabitants attempt to conquer the Twelve Confederate Worlds. After a grim and titanic battle in which satellites are moved from their orbits, they are repelled. The entire story is a history of the battles of this war without utterance from a single inhabitant, let alone fictional character. The story took first place in the issue beating out H.P. Lovecraft, Henry S. Whitehead, Seabury Quinn, Greye La Spina, Frank Belknap Long, E. Hoffmann Price, Arthur J. Burks and the third part of a serial. This story was never announced as the winner in the magazine, for at press time *Out of the Long Ago* by Seabury Quinn and *The Ocean Leach* by Frank Belknap Long were battling it out for first place. Quinn got second, but Long slid to sixth by the time the final ratings were in.

Letters were pouring in from readers who wanted more "astronomical" stories and Wright promised they would have them. This was before Gernsback had launched *Amazing Stories* and *Argosy* was reaching its lowest ebb on them. Wright's intuition to launch a "pseudo science" magazine was more on target than he dreamed. Even a youthful Anthony Boucher writing under his real name of William Anthony Parker White had a letter in the March, 1925 issue asking for more Schlossel.

Schlossel was then living at 418 Georgia Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y. and hopefully had received his \$40.00 check for his 7,000 word story. It would be reprinted in

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the August, 1938 issue and wind up in last place! *Weird Tales* ran a two-part 20,000 word novelette by Schlossel announced as *Hurled Out Into the Infinite* and published in the June and July, 1925 issues as *Hurled Into the Infinite*. This time Schlossel told of human adventures on a planet of another star, but without the super science that marked his first novel. This work revealed his weakness at characterization and dialogue, but still displayed a story-telling ability. The first installment received only six votes while the winner Greye La Spina wracked up 33 with *Invaders from the Dark*. In July he only scored six votes against 48 for *The Werewolf of Ponkert* by H. Warner Munn.

Schlossel was to have one more story in *Weird Tales*, *A Message From Space* in the March, 1926 issue, concerning an earthman who builds an experimental radio television set from a diagram in a radio magazine (Hugo Gernsback was publishing such material in his *Science and Invention* and *Radio News*) and receives a pictorial message from a planet circling in figure eight, a distant double sun, telling of an attempt to alter the planet's orbit so it would circle only one of the suns. Though this story rated only a tie for third place, it received 27 votes, more than his *Invaders from the Outside*. It again underscored that *Weird Tales* readers wanted science fiction, though Farnsworth Wright never bought another Schlossel story, despite the fact that the author kept submitting. As recently as May 22, 1939, I visited Farnsworth Wright in his New York City offices and a new manuscript by J. Schlossel was on his desk.

Wright's unwillingness to purchase more by Schlossel was obviously due in the man's lack of writing skill, which, except when it came to scientific action, was on an amateur level. He was, however, an author with super science ideas and his long novelette *The Second Swarm*, which appeared in Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories Quarterly* for Spring, 1928 was a remarkable story, by far Schlossel's best, and the most advanced story to appear up to that time telling of the discovery, battles for and colonization of planets around other suns. It dealt with interstellar space ships and interstellar war. Like his initial success in *Weird Tales*, it was told as history with no lead characters, merely a vivid and exciting chronicle of events.

Gernsback, who was understandably impressed, had artist Frank R. Paul do eight marvelously imaginative illustrations for it and blurbed: "For sheer daring and power of imagination, *The Second Swarm* will remain for years to come an outstanding work in scientific fiction . . . An interplanetary story such as this has never been imagined . . . We consider it one of the greatest interplanetary stories that has come along in years." Yet, despite these plaudits, and despite the fact that he was still writing, Schlossel never again appeared in a fantasy fiction magazine.

Whispering Tunnels by Stephen Bagby, a 14,000 word novelette that earned the cover of the February, 1925 *Weird Tales* scored 50 votes, the highest up to its time. Its locale was Fort Vaux in France, one of a complex of military strongholds, joined underground by an intricate maze of natural caves and man-made tunnels. Super-

natural manifestations precede the mysterious disappearances of various personnel. The explanation is partially natural (underground geysers) and partially supernatural (multiple curses of centuries of victims). The writing is above-average for the time, but the otherworldly appearances (which remind one of those in William Hope Hodgson's Carnacki stories) ask the reader to accept too much. Bagby, who went on to write several other popular stories for *Weird Tales*, was a non de plume for Charles M. Stephens, then residing at 125 Riverside Drive, New York City. He received half a cent a word for his efforts.

Robert Spencer Carr had yet to reach his 14th birthday when his science fiction short *The Composite Brain* was published in the March, 1925 issue of *Weird Tales*. Though the total number of votes cast for him was only nine, it won him first place. The story told of a mad scientist who created living protoplasm and using it as a base, grafted on a bulldog's head, poison fangs from a snake, tentacles from an octopus, hands from a man and fashioned a complex segmented brain that controlled all those diverse parts. "It is because you liked *The Brain in the Jar* so much that we are offering you *The Composite Brain*," Farnsworth Wright told his readers. Wright took a personal interest in the young man, who left his home in Ashley, Ohio to make his fortune in Chicago. His novel of the high school set, *The Rampant Age* (1928), enjoyed good sales and critical attention and won him a shot at Hollywood screen writing.

The Composite Brain was 3,900 words in length and earned the author \$20.00. Carr sold Wright a number of others, the most successful *Spider-Bite* in the June, 1926 issue, which won him 40 votes. It was a well-done horror story of a mummy revived by bites from 12 tomb spiders and killed by a bite from one. There was no question that Carr was rapidly improving, but his success with *The Rampant Age* (dedicated to Farnsworth Wright) set him off on a five-year stay overseas, much of it in Russia, where he succumbed to the utopian image of communism. His correspondence with Farnsworth Wright was received at 4 Aya Zuenigorodskay Ulfsta, dom 7, Kvar-tira 2, Moskva 100, USSR.

The dose of communism as it was actually practiced did not take and his utter revulsion of it was expressed in his short story *Murder in Moscow* which appeared in *Blue Book* for January, 1951. *Blue Book* also published his most successful work of science fiction "Laughter of the Stars" which appeared in his collection *Beyond Infinity* (Fantasy Press 1950-51).

A far more legitimate work of science fiction than *The Composite Brain* was the story with the poetic title *When the Green Star Waned* by an author whose name, Nictzin Dyalhis was far too bizarre to be a non de plume and who had already become noted as a regular contributor to *Adventure* magazine. This was the age of intriguing titles like *The Land That Time Forgot*, *Yedra of the Painted Desert*, *Palos of the Dog Star Pack*, *Polaris of the Snows*, *The Moon Pool*, *The Citadel of Fear* and *The Abyss of Wonders*. *When the Green Star Waned* was a title that rivaled them all. Its 63 votes made it the single most popular story of 1925 and the fifth most popular

story in the entire history of *Weird Tales*. It tells of a time when most of the planets of our solar system have civilizations and are in communication with one another. When, after a long period of time no signals of any sort come from Aerth (rather obvious), the other worlds send an investigation team. Aerth has been conquered by a semi-solid race from the dark side of the moon, impervious to rays from the blaster guns. Earth men are enslaved by mind control and fed to huge monster-like creatures, new to the planet. A federation of the other planets overcomes the conquerors through the use of dissonant music which has crippling effect on them. Today, the story remains readable and the ideas must have seemed rather unique in 1925.

A sequel, *The Oath of Hul Jok in the September, 1928 Weird Tales* had an unusual plot. A captured specimen of the semi-solid race influences the minds of the wives of the most prominent men of the federation to withhold their sexual favors. With their help it escapes, taking along the wives. The efforts to recapture him and restore the affection of the wives to their mates occupies what is actually a humorous interplanetary farce. It won second place in its issue with 20 votes, being beaten out by the final installment of Edmond Hamilton's space opera and super science interstellar adventure *Crashing Suns*, which secured 25 endorsements.

Up to this point, an issue-by-issue presentation and analysis of the winning stories in each issue of *Weird Tales* has been given to acquaint the reader with the type of story most popular and a little bit about the author. Obviously, this approach cannot be continued without presenting a book-length opus. Along with this article I have made up tables which show the most popular story in each issue of *Weird Tales* while the rating system was in effect. I have made another showing the most popular stories of each year. There is also a short table showing the authors that won first place most frequently. Finally, I have made up a table showing the most popular stories in order of the voting for the entire period. In this table I have only included 55 winners in total. I started a table showing the most unpopular stories in *Weird Tales* during this period, but thought the better of it, though I will have a few comments to make in this regard.

I will use the remainder of this article to primarily offer further information and commentary on the most popular stories by actual number of votes run in *Weird Tales* during the period November, 1924 to January, 1940, beyond question the golden age of this remarkable magazine.

The single most popular story of the entire period, *The Woman of the Wood* by A. Merritt has already been discussed and I offer much more elaborate information upon it in my book *A. Merritt: Reflections in the Moon Pool* from Oswald Train: Publishers in Philadelphia. Merritt's story had received 101 votes. The second most popular story was *Shambleau* by C.L. Moore, which boasted 85 enthusiastic approvals. This tale was published in the November, 1933 issue and was the first tale of Northwest Smith, the ray-scarred interplanetary adventurer, who befriends, a strange woman on the

planet Mars who, in place of hair, has knee-length masses of blood-red writhing, worm-like tendrils. Once she has embraced a man, they coil about him, inducing profound sexual ecstasy, which gradually results in drawing the life force from him and eventually in death.

Moore had repeatedly claimed this was her first story. In the September, 1934 issue of *The Fantasy Fan*, Mortimer Weisinger in his column *Weird Whisperings* wrote: "Catherine L. Moore, already acknowledged as one of the most promising *Weird Tales* authors, gleaned a rejection slip from *Amazing Stories* for the first story she ever penned. And she doesn't blame the editor for spurning the manuscript." In the September, 1934 issue of *Fantasy Magazine*, Mort Weisinger had a column headed *The Ether Vibrates* and this carried the information that: "C.L. Moore first submitted her 'Northwest Smith' stories to *Wonder* on June 8, 1933. They were rejected six days later—only because of their weird theme."

E. Hoffmann Price in his first of a series *Book of the Dead: Chapter 1 - Farnsworth Wright*, published in the July, 1944 issue of *The Ghost*, told of his being in the office of *Weird Tales* in 1933. On that day Farnsworth Wright handed him the manuscript of *Shambleau*. So enthusiastic were they about it that Wright quit work "and we declared a C.L. Moore Day. Some years later," Price continued, "when I met the young lady, and told her of the furor, she said that while she'd love to believe I wasn't a polite liar, she simply couldn't."

C.L. Moore was to go on to win first place in various issues in which her stories appeared a total of eight times, out of 17 published stories. During most of this period she lived at 2547 Brookside Parkway, South Drive, Indianapolis, Indiana and worked in a local bank. *Weird Tales* purchased all serial rights for *Shambleau* and paid her \$100.00 for its 11,000 words.

Her second most popular story was *Black Thirst*, published in the April, 1934 *Weird Tales*. It received 57 votes, the 10th highest in the history of the magazine. The locale is Venus where a member of an ancient race which evolved out of oceanic slime, breeds women of such superlative beauty that he feeds from its essence as a vampire would ingest human blood. *Black Thirst* was her second story in *Weird Tales* and her third, *Scarlet Dream* in the May, 1934 number won first place in the issue with 38 votes. *Black Thirst* revealed that the writer must either be a woman or a homosexual, through certain references to male beauty. *Scarlet Dream* was a rerun of a sequence in *The Time Machine* by H.G. Wells with an idle race of humans living in an idyllic style, assembling to be fed by a creature that itself is raising them for food, a parallel of the Eloi and the Morlocks.

Moore's most popular story in her series about the female warrior Jirel of Joiry was *Black God's Kiss* in *Weird Tales* for October, 1934 which tallied up 32 votes, the 54th most popular during the period 1924 to 1940. It is worth noting that Moore's most popular stories in *Weird Tales* all were published in her first year of writing and though she would win first place four more times, she would in no case even approach the popularity of that early quartet of stories. *Black God's Kiss* is an

allegory driving home the oft-repeated moral "that we always kill the one we love." Conquered and humiliated by the warrior Guillaume, Jirel symbolically makes a trip to hell to find a weapon to defeat him. This is transmitted by a kiss from the Black Stone God through Jirel to Guillaume. As he lies dead on the floor, Jirel is devastated by the revelation that the intensity of her feeling against him was fueled by love.

For *Black Thirst's* 15,000 words Moore received \$145.00 and sold all serial and radio rights; the 9,200 words of *Scarlet Dream* grossed her \$90.00 for all serial and radio rights; and she was sent \$120.00 for the 12,000 words of *Black God's Kiss* and for this she sold only first serial and radio rights.

The Outsider by H.P. Lovecraft published in the April, 1926 *Weird Tales* with 82 votes was the third most popular story ever rated by the magazine's readers. The impact it made was still evident in 1939 when August Derleth used it as the title story for the first collection ever done of that author.

It was Derleth whose letter appeared in the June, 1926 issue with the comment: "That story is worthy of Poe, and, if I may say so, I believe it to be better than any work of Poe, and I have read every bit of Poe except his letters." I not only take exception to that opinion but also strongly doubt that Derleth read *all* of Poe, for if he had, he could not have failed to notice that the opening pages of *The Outsider* are a rewrite of the opening pages of Poe's *Berenice*. As for any doubts, Lovecraft plants two "nepenthes" on the last page of his story. One guess as to where he picked up that word!

The Outsider is a story of one of the undead, who lives in an underground ruin. Seeking to rise out of the gloom and darkness of his abode, he emerges in a graveyard. He enters through a window into a great ball room where men and women are dancing. At the sight of him, they dash screaming from the room. Searching for a single person he confronts himself in a full-length mirror as a horror from the grave. Even this portion seems to owe a debt to Poe's lines in *The Masque of the Red Death*: "Then, summoning the wild courage of despair, a throng of the revellers at once threw themselves into the black apartment, and, seizing the mummer, whose tall figure stood erect and motionless within the shadow of the ebony clock, gasped in unutterable horror at finding the grave ceremonies and corpselike mask which they handled with so violent a rudeness, untenanted by any tangible form."

In recent years critical opinion has correctly swung to regarding *The Colour Out of Space*, *The Dunwich Horror*, *The Rats in the Walls* and *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* as titles more worthy of being regarded as literary masterpieces. Criticism aside, Lovecraft went on to win a total of 16 first places, more than any one else but Seabury Quinn.

Lovecraft's second most popular story with 58 tallies was *The Call of Cthulhu* in the February, 1928 number. While not one of his best stories, it was here that he first formally presented his thesis that expanded into the Cthulhu mythos and the concept evidentially had great appeal to the readers.

The Dunwich Horror by H.P. Lovecraft received 51 votes from readers of the April, 1929 issue in which it appeared. This masterpiece tells the bizarre story of the son of an alien creature from out of space and a mentally defective woman, who in his youth looks like a normal human but who knows that as he grows older he will become more like the monstrous hulk that still lives and virtually fills a house. This tale is very clearly science fiction despite the incorporation of several incantations.

For *The Outsider*, which was 2,500 words in length Lovecraft received \$25.00 and sold American serial rights: *Call of Cthulhu* brought him \$165 for its 11,200 words; and *The Dunwich Horror* earned him \$240 for its 16,600 words. It is quite evident that Lovecraft was being paid 1½ cents a word, which was 50% more than most of the other contributors to *Weird Tales* received.

This rate worked against Lovecraft, because hard-pressed Farnsworth Wright became very selective. When *The Lurking Fear* won first place in the June, 1928 issue with 33 votes, Lovecraft was getting one cent a word or \$78.00 for its 7,800 words. When his next highest-rated story, written in collaboration with E. Hoffmann Price, *Through the Gates of the Silver Key* appeared in the July, 1934 issue it was paid for with a check for \$140.00 for the 15,000 words or slightly under a cent a word. The 1½ cent a word was paid for a relatively few years and only a few stories.

If we are to go by reader preference, Seabury Quinn was the most popular author that ever wrote for *Weird Tales*, winning the top spot 30 times, almost twice as much as his nearest competitor H.P. Lovecraft. His highest scoring story was *Roads* published in the January, 1938 *Weird Tales*. It received 79 votes, the fourth highest in the scoring period of the publications. It used to be tradition for mass-circulation magazines to run an eerie tale of the supernatural in the issue circulated at Christmas time. In that sense it scarcely seems out of place for *Weird Tales* to run an outre tale in its Christmas issue, except that *Roads* by Seabury Quinn was an adult tale about Santa Claus!

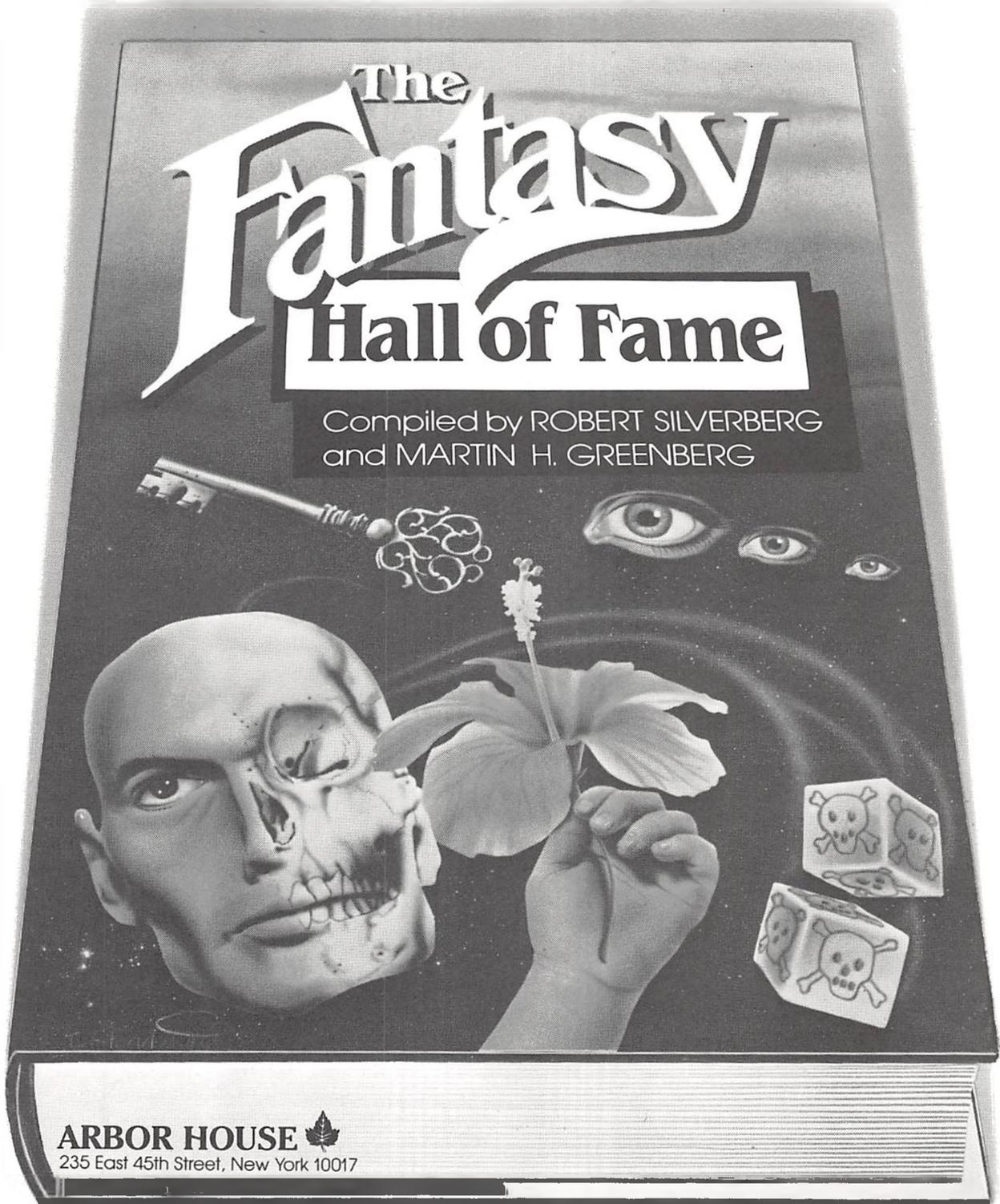
The Jules de Grandin stories which had run for so many years began to get stale and Quinn was alternating them with very serious and adult tales, many of them more off-beat than fantasy, that represented the peak of his attainment. *Roads* was part of that group and unquestionably the best single story he wrote. Conrad H. Ruppert, publisher and printer of *Fantasy Magazine*, reprinted the story as an attractive brochure in 1938 and mailed it to his friends that yuletide as a Christmas card. August Derleth, who did not think too highly of Quinn's work, particularly the de Grandin stories, issued *Roads* in a special edition illustrated by Virgil Finlay in 1948.

Quinn's first published story was a weird tale titled *Demons of the Night*, rejected by 30 publishers before it was finally accepted. He wrote that story in 1917 and its place of publication is known only as "a pulp paper magazine." The earliest by-lined piece by him actually known is *The Law of the Movies* under the name Seabury Grandin Quinn in pages 47 to 49 of *Motion Picture Magazine*, December, 1917. It dealt with the preoccupation rising young authors lavish on absurd legal ques-

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tions for situations that they are highly unlikely to encounter.

The second highest-ranking story Quinn wrote for *Weird Tales* was a Jules de Grandin story, *The Man Who Cast No Shadows* in the February, 1927 issue, securing 58 reader endorsements. A young man is found unconscious several times from loss of blood and a young woman mysteriously disappears. Jules de Grandin drives a stake into the grave of an old woman vampire and kills a count from Transylvania as he is about to murder a young virgin and drink her blood. This is an acceptable but scarcely exceptional traditional vampire tale and it is hard to reconcile its popularity.

The Globe of Memories by Seabury Quinn in the February, 1937 *Weird Tales* with 55 votes was an exceptional story that had the distinction of receiving Virgil Finlay's first full-color magazine cover. *The Globe of Memories* told the rich and colorful stories of two lovers who adventure and are separated through many lives until they finally are reunited in the contemporary world with the shared link of memories.

For a long stretch in the twenties Seabury Quinn was editor of *Sunnyside* and *Casketa* prominent mortuary trade magazine. This seemed particularly appropriate for a man in his vein of writing. By another circumstance, I am currently publisher of a trade magazine known as *Quick Frozen Foods International*. I had for a period as an associate editor a young man named Fred Vogel, who is at this writing the editor of *Sunnyside and Casket!*

Though Seabury Quinn's Jules de Grandin story *The Man Who Cast No Shadow* was the most popular of the character's career, it was not the best liked story of the February, 1927 issue in which it appeared. That distinction went to *The Atomic Conquerors* by Edmond Hamilton, a super science epic in which the "people" in the macrocosm, with the Earth in the middle. That proved the sixth most popular story ever rated in *Weird Tales* with 62 votes. Hamilton at that time was operating out of Box 91, New Castle, Pennsylvania and he relinquished all serial rights for \$98 on a 9,800 word story.

Evolution Island in the March, 1927 issue was Hamilton's second most popular story, and despite its old-fashioned format of starting with a lecture on evolution, it deserved it. A scientist invents a ray that will speed up evolution of plants, birds, animals, fish and even himself. Hamilton goes into considerable detail on the wide divergence of evolutionary paths of the various forms of life, and though the tale is science fiction it is frightening. The development of intelligent plant life and how their attempt to take over the world is aborted by reversing the evolutionary process at high speed so that everything returns to protoplasmic slime is well told. It is obvious that this story is a precursor to Hamilton's better known *The Man Who Evolved* (*Wonder Stories*, April, 1931).

There would eventually be nine first places for Edmond Hamilton including *The Metal Giants'* 45 votes, *The Monster God of Mamurth*, 41 votes (which would have taken first place in the issue if A. Merritt's *The Woman of the Wood* had not been in contention), *The Time Raiders*, *Crashing Suns*, *The Polar Doom*, *The*

Avenger From Atlantis. Even the reprinting of *The Monster God of Mamurth* won first place in the September, 1935 *Weird Tales*. It should be remembered that, up until John Campbell's take over of *Astounding Science-Fiction*, novelty of the idea took precedence over literary style as a criteria of the popularity of a given piece of science fiction, which was then regarded as a literature of ideas.

The eighth most popular story ever voted upon in *Weird Tales*, garnering 58 votes for first place in the January, 1927 issue, almost double that given second place story *The Horror Out of Red Hook* by H.P. Lovecraft was *The Last Horror* by Eli Colter. The writer of *The Last Horror* had sold fiction previously to *Weird Tales*.

Today, *The Last Horror* would be considered a racist story since its plot concerned a black born with white hands, who has gotten rich from oil found on his lands, and, with a captured scientist and unwilling whites, is gradually grafting white skin on his body with the ultimate objective of becoming completely white. He virtually succeeds deterred only when his white prisoners remind him that he will be white in appearance but he will breed black and that when he is found out he will be accepted by neither race. This argument causes him to commit suicide. When the story was reprinted in the February, 1939 *Weird Tales*, it won fourth place, still beating out works by Donald Wandrei, Robert Bloch, Manly Wade Wellman, Thomas P. Kelley and August Derleth!

The Last Horror was anthologized as the lead story in the Selwyn & Blount collection *You'll Need a Night Light* edited by Christine Campbell Thomson, Selwyn & Blount, September, 1927. Colter received \$50.00 for its 10,000 words from *Weird Tales* in 1927, a one years' free subscription for the reprinting in 1939. Charles Lovell acted as agent for the British rights but there is no record of payment for those.

Colter had a number of other stories in *Weird Tales*, *The Dark Chrysalis*, a short serial winning first place with 28 votes in the August, 1927 number; *The Man in the Green Coat* gaining first spot with 15 votes in August, 1928 issue. Colter's first sale to *Weird Tales* had been a four-part, 28,000 word novella which ran January to April, 1926. The final installment of *On the Dead Man's Chest* received 47 votes. It was an occult work, strong on the spiritism, about a very fat, horribly ugly man who is a member of an atheistic bachelor's club. After death, his body in the mortuary grows gradually more attractive and the climax is the revelation that his spirit has returned in the guise of a handsome young man who has joined the club and the trauma of the dead man's temporary return and his assurance that there is a wonderful life after death, results in the club members embracing religion. Only the presence of *The Outsider* cost Colter first place, and it did beat out *Wolfshhead* by Robert E. Howard.

The Damned Chink, a 6,000-word gold-mining story about a prospecting oriental who surmounts the rank prejudices of the white miners by saving their lives and their fortunes, appeared in *Short Stories* for March 10,

1925, all serial rights sold for \$90.00 or 1½ cent a word (which was a beginner's rate for that magazine at that period). This was the author's only story in *Short Stories*, there were indications that the author had been writing for some time, having given up a career of playing the pipe organ and the piano in theatres (presumably silent picture theatres). Residence was at 92 E. 83rd St. North, Portland, Oregon and the author's yen for westerns came from a love of the outdoors and the Chinese character from a craving for authentic Chinese dishes. When the story *The Last Horror* appeared in *Weird Tales*, there had been a move to 686 East 81st St., North Portland, Oregon by Colter.

That Colter, like many other authors, would accept one half cent a word from *Weird Tales* when they were getting 1½ cents or more elsewhere indicates that these stories were something they wanted to write. Westerns were evidently Colter's forté, for in October, 1927 she had *Gun Shy*, a 25,000 word novella in *Lariat Story Magazine* and there was later praise for it in the reader's columns. As late as the December, 1950 issue of *Real Western Stories*, a short "N" for *Nemesis* was featured on the cover. A sale there was not injured by the fact that Robert Lowndes was the editor.

The fact that many western story magazines bragged about their writers being true-life cowboys, attesting to the authenticity of their story backgrounds, was a primary reason for the contraction of Colter's first name from Elizabeth to Eli. Other women had made a success writing westerns, most notably Bertha M. Bower who signed all her stories B.M. Bowers.

In every contest there are losers, those who rate low in the reader's ratings. As we have seen, an outstanding

story can lose out because a popular masterpiece appears in the same issue. The major author who most consistently rated low in *Weird Tales* was August W. Derleth. Despite the fact that he had more stories in that magazine than any other contributor, only once did he win first place and that was with a pastiche of H.P. Lovecraft, *The Return of Hastur* in the March, 1939 issue. Derleth, on a number of occasions, had noted that his weird tales were written hastily. In the foreword to his collection *Not Long For This World* (Arkham House, 1948) he wrote: "That is to say the majority of the stories in this book are mediocre; since the majority of my writing in the past two decades is likewise mediocre, this is perhaps as it should be. Most of these stories were written as fillers; for those who are not familiar with the terminology of magazine-editing, a 'filler' is a short story, usually of no consequence, which is used to take up the slack space between the major stories and the advertising pages."

It would have been fascinating if *Weird Tales* had continued its rating of stories right through to the end. Many good stories appeared from 1940 on, not excluding August Derleth. Certainly *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* and *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* by H.P. Lovecraft would have rated high. Seabury Quinn continued at a good level for many years. Ray Bradbury was a regular during the forties. Fritz Leiber made his debut to *Weird Tales* readers. Robert Bloch was at the forefront in originality. Edmond Hamilton was showing no decline and the magazine even found a new William Hope Hodgson novelette. For those later issues we will have to create our personal list of "bests," and I, for one, will find it more to my liking than consensus voting.

THE STORIES VOTED MOST POPULAR BY READERS OF WEIRD TALES ISSUE BY ISSUE
NOVEMBER, 1924 TO JANUARY, 1940
(With a few high-ranking second-place entries)

No. of votes	Month	1924	No. of votes	Month	1925	No. of votes	Month	1927
24	Nov.	The Brain in the Jar by N. E. Hammerstrom & Richard F. Seairight	47	April	On the Dead Man's Chest by Eli Colter (Part 4)	29	Oct.	The Red Brain by Donald Wandrei
9	Dec.	Death Waters by Frank Belknap Long	31	April	Wolfshead by Robert E. Howard	30	Nov.	The Invading Horde by Arthur J. Burks (9 against)
25	Jan.	Invaders From the Outside by J. Schlossel	54	May	The Ghosts of Steamboat Coulee by Arthur J. Burks (6 against)	44	Dec.	The Gods of East and West by Seabury Quinn
22	Jan.	Out of the Long Ago by Seabury Quinn	31	May	The Dead Hand by Seabury Quinn	35	Jan.	The Time Raider by Edmond Hamilton (Part 4)
50	Feb.	Whispering Tunnels by Stephen Bagby	40	June	Spider-Bite by Robert Spencer Carr	58	Feb.	The Call of Cthulhu by H. P. Lovecraft
27	Feb.	The Statement of Randolph Carter by H. P. Lovecraft	33	July	Through the Vortex by Donald E. Keyhoe	22	Mar.	The Giant World by Ray Cummings (Part 3)
9	Mar.	The Composite Brain by Robert Spencer Carr	32	July	The House of Horror by Seabury Quinn	28	April	The Chain by H. Warner Munn
63	April	When the Green Star Waned by Nictzen Dyalhis	101	Aug.	The Woman of the Wood by A. Merritt	28	April	The Jewel of Seven Stones by Seabury Quinn
40	April	The Wind That Tramps the World by Frank Owen	41	Aug.	The Monster-God of Mamurth by Edmond Hamilton	14	May	The Strange People by Murray Leinster (Part 3)
25	May	Under the 'N' Ray by W. Smith and R. Robbins	50	Sept.	The Bird of Space by Everil Worrell	33	June	The Lurking Fear by H. P. Lovecraft
33	June	Invaders From the Dark by Greye La Spina (Part 3)	34	Sept.	The Night Wire by H. F. Arnold	27	July	The Space Eaters by Frank Belknap Long
48	July	The Werewolf of Ponkert by H. Warner Munn	25	Oct.	Fettered by Greye La Spina (Part 4)	15	Aug.	The Man in the Green Coat by Eli Colter
33	July	The Stranger From Kurdistan by E. Hoffmann Price	25	Oct.	The Supreme Witch by G. A. Terrill	25	Sept.	Crashing Suns by Edmond Hamilton (Part 3)
13	Aug.	The Purple Cincture by H. Thompson Rich	42	Nov.	The Castle of Furos by Everil Worrell	18	Oct.	Restless Souls by Seabury Quinn
13	Aug.	The Oldest Story in the World by Murray Leinster	45	Dec.	The City of Spiders by H. Warner Munn	24	Nov.	The Polar Doom by Edmond Hamilton
13	Aug.	Black Medicine by Arthur J. Burks	59	Jan.	The Metal Giants by Edmond Hamilton	23	Nov.	The Last Test by Adolphe de Casto
17	Sept.	The Temple by H. P. Lovecraft	30	Jan.	The Last Horror by Eli Colter	35	Dec.	The Copper Bowl by Maj. George Fielding Elliot
48	Oct.	The Eternal Conflict by Nictzen Dyalhis	30	Jan.	The Horror at Red Hook by H. P. Lovecraft	21	Jan.	Bimini by Bassett Morgan
21	Oct.	The Horror on the Links by Seabury Quinn	28	Jan.	Drome by John Martin Leahy (Part 1)	15	Feb.	The Devil-People by Seabury Quinn
15	Oct.	The Wicked Flea by J. U. Giesy (16 against)	62	Feb.	The Atomic Conquerors by Edmond Hamilton	22	Mar.	The Phantom Farmhouse by Seabury Quinn (Reprint)
26	Nov.	Lukundooy by Edward Lucas White	58	Feb.	The Man Who Cast No Shadow by Seabury Quinn	51	April	The Dunwich Horror by H. P. Lovecraft
34	Dec.	The Tenants of Broussac by Seabury Quinn	33	Feb.	The Star Shell by G. and B. Wallis (Part 4)	15	May	The Girl From Samarcand by E. Hoffmann Price
15	Jan.	Stealer of Souls by C. H. Craig	51	Mar.	The City of Glass by J. M. Nichols, Jr.	26	June	The House of Golden Masks by Seabury Quinn
37	Feb.	The Isle of Missing Ships by Seabury Quinn	49	Mar.	Evolution Island by Edmond Hamilton	25	July	The Corpse Master by Seabury Quinn
26	Feb.	The Waning of a World by W. Elwyn Backus (Part 4)	36	Mar.	The Blood Flower by Seabury Quinn	32	Aug.	The Shadow Kingdom by Robert E. Howard
23	Feb.	The Red Ether by Peter Marzoni (Part 1)	31	April	Explorers Into Infinity by Ray Cummings (Part 1)	23	Sept.	The Hound by H. P. Lovecraft
49	Mar.	Lochinvar Lodge by D. B. Clason (22 against)	52	June	Explorers Into Infinity by Ray Cummings (Part 3)	23	Sept.	The White Wizard by Sophie Wenzell Ellis
37	Mar.	The Music of Madness by W. E. Barrett	19	July	The Ultimate Problem by Victor Rousseau	22	Sept.	Transpassing Souls by Seabury Quinn
82	April	The Outsider by H. P. Lovecraft	28	Aug.	The Dark Chrysalis by Eli Colter (Part 3)	13	Oct.	Skull Face by Robert E. Howard (Part 1)
			18	Sept.	The Dead Wagon by Greye La Spina	9	Nov.	The House Without a Mirror by Seabury Quinn

No. of votes	Month	1929
31	Dec.	Skull-Face by Robert E. Howard (Part 3)
		1930
16	Jan.	The Curse of the House of Phipps by Seabury Quinn
11	Feb.	Thirsty Blades by Otis Adelbert Kline & E. Hoffmann Price
11	Mar.	The Haunted Chessmen by E. R. Pushon
7	April	The Dust of Egypt by Seabury Quinn
18	May	The End of the Story by Clark Ashton Smith
19	June	The Rats in the Walls by H. P. Lovecraft (Reprint)
10	June	In the Borderland by P. Diaz
16	July	The Bride of Dewey by Seabury Quinn
15	Aug.	Daughter of the Moonlight by Seabury Quinn
11	Sept.	Another Dracula by Ralph Milne Farley (Part 1)
10	Oct.	The Druid's Shadow by Seabury Quinn
34	Nov.	Kings of the Night by Robert E. Howard
12	Dec.	Something From Above by Donald Wandrei
		1931
12	Jan.	The Lost Lady by Seabury Quinn
28	Feb.-Mar.	The Horror From the Hills by Frank Belknap Long (Part 3)
24	Feb.-Mar.	The Picture by Francis Flagg
29	Apr.-May	A Rendezvous in Averogine by Clark Ashton Smith
21	June-July	The Seeds of Death by David H. Keller, M. D.
19	June-July	The Outsider by H. P. Lovecraft (Reprint)
27	Aug.	The Whisperer in Darkness by H. P. Lovecraft
18	Sept.	Satan's Stepson by Seabury Quinn
21	Oct.	The Strange High House in the Mist by H. P. Lovecraft
26	Nov.	Placide's Wife by Kirk Mashburn
22	Dec.	Tam, Son of the Tiger by Otis Adelbert Kline (Part 6)
		1932
11	Jan.	The Monster of the Prophecy by Clark Ashton Smith
11	Feb.	The Devil's Bride by Seabury Quinn (Part 1)
11	Feb.	The Tree Men of M'Bwa by Donald Wandrei
16	Mar.	The Devil's Bride by Seabury Quinn (Part 2)
15	Mar.	The Vengeance of Ixmal by Kirk Mashburn
18	April	In the Vault by H. P. Lovecraft
17	April	The Red Witch by Nictzin Dyalhis
26	May	The Last Magician by David H. Keller, M. D.
25	May	The Vaults of Yoh-Vombis by Clark Ashton Smith
25	June	The Devil's Pool by Greve La Spina
25	July	The Devil's Bride by Seabury Quinn (Part 6)
19	Aug.	The Bride of the Peacock by E. Hoffmann Price
11	Sept.	The Empire of the Necromancers by Clark Ashton Smith
19	Oct.	The Wand of Doom by Jack Williamson
17	Nov.	Worms of the Earth by Robert E. Howard
14	Dec.	The Lives of Alfred Kramer by Donald Wandrei
		1933
31	Jan.	The Scarlet Citadel by Robert E. Howard
18	Feb.	De Brignac's Lady by Kirk Mashburn
24	Mar.	The Thing in the Fog by Seabury Quinn
38	April	Revelations in Black by Carl Jacoby
19	May	Dead Man's Belt by Hugh B. Cave
27	June	Black Colossus by Robert E. Howard
21	July	The Dreams in the Witch-House by H. P. Lovecraft
13	Aug.	The Chosen of Vishnu by Seabury Quinn
30	Sept.	Golden Blood by Jack Williamson (Part 6)
14	Oct.	The House of the Worm by Mearle Prout
85	Nov.	Shambleau by C. L. Moore
17	Dec.	Red Gauntlet of Czerni by Seabury Quinn
		1934
38	Jan.	The Woman of the Wood by A. Merritt (Reprint)
32	Jan.	The Solitary Hunters by David H. Keller, M. D. (Part 1)
21	Feb.	The Sapphire Goddess by Nictzin Dyalhis
32	Mar.	The Solitary Hunters by David H. Keller, M. D. (Part 3)
57	April	Black Thirst by C. L. Moore
38	May	Scarlet Dream by C. L. Moore
35	June	They Called Him Ghost by Laurence J. Cahill
33	July	Through the Gates of the Silver Key by H. P. Lovecraft & E. Hoffmann Price
30	Aug.	The Three Marked Pennies by Mary Elizabeth Counselman
12	Sept.	The Jest of Warburg Tantavul by Seabury Quinn
32	Oct.	The Black God's Kiss by C. L. Moore
11	Nov.	The Golden Glow by S. Gordon Curwit
17	Dec.	A Witch Shall Be Born by Robert E. Howard
		1935
19	Jan.	The Feast in the Abbey by Robert Bloch
8	Feb.	The Web of the Living Death by Seabury Quinn
12	Mar.	Julhi by C. L. Moore
22	April	Out of the Eons by Hazel Heald
14	May	The Bronze Casket by Richard H. Hart
13	June	The Horror in the Studio by Dorothy Quick
19	July	The Avenger From Atlantis by Edmond Hamilton
22	Aug.	Once in a Thousand Years by Francis Bragg Middleton
14	Sept.	The Monster-God of Mamurth by Edmond Hamilton (Reprint)
12	Sept.	Vultthoom by Clark Ashton Smith

No. of votes	Month	1935
12	Sept.	The Man Who Chained the Lightning by Paul Ernst
21	Oct.	The Six Sleepers by Edmond Hamilton
17	Nov.	The Way Home by Paul Frederick Stern
22	Dec.	The Hour of the Dragon by Robert E. Howard (Part 1)
		1936
32	Jan.	A Rival From the Grave by Seabury Quinn
28	Feb.	Yvala by C. L. Moore
28	Mar.	The Crystal Curse by Eando Binder
16	Mar.	The Graveyard Rats by Henry Kuttner
27	April	The Hour of the Dragon by Robert E. Howard (Part 5)
14	April	The Face in the Wind by Carl Jacobi
29	May	The Room of Shadows by Arthur J. Burks
14	June	Black Canaan by Robert E. Howard
14	July	Loot of the Vampire by Thorp McClusky (Part 2)
16	Aug.-Sept.	Red Nails by Robert E. Howard (Part 2)
20	Oct.	Red Nails by Robert E. Howard (Part 3)
20	Oct.	The Lost Door by Dorothy Quick
18	Nov.	Pickman's Model by H. P. Lovecraft (Reprint)
16	Nov.	Witch-House by Seabury Quinn
21	Dec.	The Hunter of the Dark by H. P. Lovecraft
		1937
33	Jan.	The Thing on the Doorstep by H. P. Lovecraft
55	Feb.	The Globe of Memories by Seabury Quinn
37	Mar.	The Last Archer by Earl Pierce, Jr.
30	Mar.	Guardian of the Book by Henry Hasse
27	April	Symphony of the Damned by John R. Speer
22	May	Duar the Accursed by Clifford Ball
23	June	The Carnal God by J. R. Speer & C. Schnitzer
19	July	The Thief of Forthe by Clifford Ball
20	Aug.	The Last Pharaoh by Thomas P. Kelley (Part 4)
21	Sept.	The Death of Ilalotha by Clark Ashton Smith
20	Oct.	The Shunned House by H. P. Lovecraft
19	Nov.	Quist of the Starstone by C. L. Moore & Henry Kuttner
50	Dec.	The Sea Witch by Nictzin Dyalhis
		1938
79	Jan.	Roads by Seabury Quinn
22	Feb.	The Diary of Alonzo Typer by William Lumley
10	Mar.	Incense of Abomination by Clark Ashton Smith
13	April	The Garden of Adompha by Clark Ashton Smith
18	May	Pigeons Fom Hell by Robert E. Howard
15	June	Slave of the Flames by Robert Bloch
26	July	He That Hath Wings by Edmond Hamilton
18	Aug.	The Black Drama by Gans T. Field (Part 3)
14	Sept.	As 'Twas Told To Me by Seabury Quinn
12	Oct.	Up Under the Roof by Manly Wade Wellman
16	Nov.	Lynne Foster is Dead by Seabury Quinn
20	Dec.	More Lives Than One by Seabury Quinn
		1939
19	Jan.	Waxworks by Robert Bloch
20	Feb.	The Double Shadow by Clark Ashton Smith
22	Mar.	The Return of Hastur by August W. Derleth
22	April	Hellsгарde by C. L. Moore
21	May	Washington Nocturne by Seabury Quinn
12	June-July	Far Below by Robert Barbour Johnson
12	June-July	The Willow Landscape by Clark Ashton Smith
22	Aug.	Spawn by P. Schuyler Miller
17	Sept.	Spanish Vampire by E. Hoffmann Price
12	Oct.	The Witch's Cat by Gans T. Field
14	Nov.	Towers of Death by Henry Kuttner
8	Dec.	King of the World's Edge by H. Warner Munn (Part 4)
8	Dec.	Glamour by Seabury Quinn
		1940
	Jan.-Feb.	Stories typed on card but with no numbers.

THE MOST POPULAR STORY OF THE YEAR IN WEIRD TALES 1924 to 1940

No. of votes	Year	Title
24	1924	The Brain in the Jar by N. E. Hammerstrom & Richard F. Seaight
63	1925	When the Green Star Waned by Nictzin Dyalhis
101	1926	The Woman of the Wood by A. Merritt
62	1927	The Atomic Conquerors by Edmond Hamilton
58	1928	The Call of Cthulhu by H. P. Lovecraft
51	1929	The Dunwich Horror by H. P. Lovecraft
34	1930	Kings of the Night by Robert E. Howard
29	1931	A Rendezvous in Averogine by Clark Ashton Smith
26	1932	The Last Magician by David H. Keller, M. D.
85	1933	Shambleau by C. L. Moore
57	1934	Black Thirst by C. L. Moore
22	1935	Out of the Eons by Hazel Heald
22	1935	Once in a Thousand Years by Francis Bragg Middleton
22	1935	The Hour of the Dragon by Robert E. Howard (Part 1)
32	1936	A Rival From the Grave by Seabury Quinn
55	1937	The Globe of Memories by Seabury Quinn
79	1938	Roads by Seabury Quinn
22	1939	The Return of Hastur by August W. Derleth
22	1939	Hellsгарde by C. L. Moore
22	1939	Spawn by P. Schuyler Miller

THE TOP-RANKED STORIES IN WEIRD TALES FROM NOVEMBER, 1924 TO JANUARY, 1940 BY READER VOTE

101	The Woman of the Wood by A. Merritt	Aug., 1926
85	Shambleau by C. L. Moore	Nov., 1933
82	The Outsider by H. P. Lovecraft	Apr., 1926
79	Roads by Seabury Quinn	Jan., 1938
63	When the Green Star Waned by Nictzin Dyalhis	Apr., 1925
62	The Atomic Conquerors by Edmond Hamilton	Feb., 1927
59	The Last Horror by Eli Colter	Jan., 1927
58	The Call of Cthulhu by H. P. Lovecraft	Feb., 1928
58	The Man Who Cast No Shadow by Seabury Quinn	Feb., 1927
57	Black Thirst by C. L. Moore	Apr., 1924
55	The Globe of Memories by Seabury Quinn	Feb., 1937
54	The Ghosts of Steamboat Coulee by Arthur J. Burks	May, 1926
52	Explorers Into Infinity by Ray Cummings (Part 3)	June, 1927
51	The City of Glass by J. M. Nichols, Jr.	Mar., 1927
51	The Dunwich Horror by H. P. Lovecraft	Apr., 1929
50	Whispering Tunnels by Stephen Bagby	Feb., 1925
50	Bird of Space by Everitt Worrell	Sept., 1926
50	The Sea Witch by Nictzin Dyalhis	Dec., 1937
49	Lochinvar Lodge by D. B. Clason (22 against)	Mar., 1926
49	Evolution Island by Edmond Hamilton	Mar., 1927
48	The Werewolf of Ponkert by H. Warner Munn	July, 1925
48	The Eternal Conflict by Nictzin Dyalhis	Oct., 1925
47	On the Dead Man's Chest by Eli Colter (Part 4)	Apr., 1926
45	The Metal Giants by Edmond Hamilton	Dec., 1926
44	The Gods of East and West by Seabury Quinn	Dec., 1927
42	The City of Spiders by H. Warner Munn	Nov., 1926
41	The Monster God of Mamurth by Edmond Hamilton	Aug., 1926
40	Spider-Bite by Robert Spencer Carr	June, 1926
40	The Wind That Tramps the World by Frank Owen	Apr., 1925
38	Scarlet Dream by C. L. Moore	May, 1935
38	The Woman of the Wood by A. Merritt (Reprint)	Jan., 1934
38	Revelations in Black by Carl Jacoby	Apr., 1933
37	The Isle of Missing Ships by Seabury Quinn	Feb., 1926
37	The Music of Madness by W. E. Barrett	Mar., 1926
37	The Last Archer by Earl Pierce, Jr.	Mar., 1937
36	The Blood Flower by Seabury Quinn	Mar., 1927
35	The Time Raider by Edmond Hamilton (Part 4)	Jan., 1928
35	The Copper Bowl by Maj. George Fielding Elliot	Dec., 1928
35	They Called Him Ghost by Laurence J. Cahill	June, 1934
34	The Tenants of Broussac by Seabury Quinn	Dec., 1925
34	The Night Wire by H. G. Arnold	Sept., 1926
34	Kings of the Night by Robert E. Howard	Nov., 1930
33	Invaders From the Dark by Greve La Spina (Part 3)	June, 1925
33	The Stranger From Kurdistan by E. Hoffmann Price	July, 1925
33	Through the Vortex by Donald E. Keyhoe	July, 1926
33	The Star Shell by G. and B. Wallis (Part 4)	Feb., 1927
33	The Lurking Fear by H. P. Lovecraft	Feb., 1928
33	Through the Gates of the Silver Key by H. P. Lovecraft and E. Hoffmann Price	July, 1934
33	The Thing on the Doorstep by H. P. Lovecraft	Jan., 1937
32	The House of Horror by Seabury Quinn	July, 1926
32	The Shadow Kingdom by Robert E. Howard	Aug., 1929
32	The Solitary Hunters by David H. Keller, M. D. (Part 1)	Jan., 1934
32	The Solitary Hunters by David H. Keller, M. D. (Part 3)	Mar., 1934
32	The Black God's Kiss by C. L. Moore	Oct., 1934
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THE CAT

by

Gene Wolfe

I am Odilo the Steward, the son of Odilo the Steward. I am he who is charged by our Autarch Severian the Great—whose desires are the dreams of his subjects—with the well-being of the Hypogeum Apotropaic. It is now the fifth year of his reign.

As all who know the ways of our House Absolute (and I may say here that I neither hope nor wish for other readers) are aware, our Hypogeum Apotropaic is that part devoted to the needs and comforts of Father Inire; and in the twenty years in which I have given satisfaction (as I hope) at my post, and in the years before them when I assisted my father, also Odilo the Steward, I have seen and heard many a strange thing. My father likewise.

This evening, when I had reached a respite in the unending tasks entailed by such a position as mine, I took myself, as my custom is, to the *culina magna* of our hypogeum to obtain some slight refreshment. The cooks' labors too were ended or nearly; and half or more, with a kitchen boy or three and a gaggle of scullery maids, sat about the dying fire, seeking, as such people will, to amuse one another by diverse boasts and recitals.

Having little better to do and being eager to rest, I bid the chief cook surrender his chair to me and heard them as I ate. It is now *Hallowmass Eve* (which is to say, the full of the *Spading Moon*) and their talk had turned to all manner of ghosts and bogeys. In the brief time required for me to chew my bread and beef and sluice them down with hot spiced ale, I heard such recountings of larva, lemures, and the like as would terrify every child in the Commonwealth— and make every man in it laugh most heartily.

So I myself laughed when I returned here to my study, where I will scrutinize and doubtless approve the bills of fare for *Hallowmas*; and yet I find I am bemused by these tales and lost amid many wondering speculations. As every thinking man acknowledges, mighty powers move through this dark universe of *Briah*, though for the most part hidden from us by its infinite night. Is it not every man's duty to record what little he has glimpsed

that may give light to it? And do not such idle tales as I heard by the fire but serve to paint yet blacker that gloom through which we grope? I am therefore determined to set down here, for the enlightenment (as it may be) of my successors and whoever else may read, the history, whole and in entire in so far as I know it, of a series of incidents that culminated (as I believe) this night ten years gone. For the earlier events, I give the testimony of my father, Odilo the Steward also, a contemporary of the *Chatelaine Sancha*.

She was (so my father said) an extraordinarily charming child, with the face of a *peri* and eyes that were always laughing, darker than most exulted children but so tall that she might have been supposed, at the age of seven or eight, to be a young woman of sixteen.

That such a child should have attracted the attention of Father Inire is scarcely to be wondered at. He has always been fond of children (and particularly of girls), as the oldest records of our hypogeum show; and I sometimes think that he has chosen to remain on *Urth* as a tutor to our race because he finds even the wisest of us to be children in his sight. Permit me to say at once that these children have often benefitted from his attention. It is true, perhaps, that they have sometimes suffered for it, but that has been seldom and I think by no means by his wish.

It has ever been the custom of the exultants resident in our House Absolute to keep their children closely confined to their own apartments and to permit them to travel the ten thousand corridors that wind such distances beneath the surface of the land (even so far as the *Old Citadel of Nessus*, some say) only under the watchful eyes of some trustworthy upper servant. And it has ever been the custom of those children to escape the upper servants charged with their supervision whenever they can, to join in the games of the children of the staff, so much more numerous, and to wander at will through the numberless leagues of the ten thousand corridors, by which frolic many have been lost at one time or another, and some forever.

Whenever Father Inire encounters such a child not already known to him, he speaks to her, and if her face and her answers please him, he may pause in the conduct of great affairs to tell her some tale of the worlds beyond Dis. (No person grown has heard these tales, for the children do not recall them well enough to recount them afterward, though they are often quite charmed by them; and before they are grown themselves they have forgotten them, as indeed I have forgotten all but a few scraps of the tale Father Inire once told me.) If he cannot take the time for that, he often confers upon the child some many-hued toy of the kind that wise men and humble men such as I, and all women and children, call magical.

Should he encounter that child a second time, as often happens, he asks her what has become of the toy, or whether she wishes to hear some other story from his store. Should he find that the toy remains unbroken and that it is still in the possession of the child, he may give another, and should the child ask politely (for Father Inire values courtesy above all knowledge) he may tell another. But if, as only very rarely happens, the child has received a toy and exhibits it still whole, but asks on this occasion for a tale of the worlds beyond Dis instead of a second toy, then Father Inire takes that child as a particular friend and pupil for long as she—or more rarely he—may live. (I boast no scholarship of words, as you that have read this humble account do already well know; but once I heard a man who was such a scholar say that this word *pupil* in its most ancient and purest state denominates the image of oneself one sees in another's eyes.)

Such a pupil Sancha became, one winter morning when she was of seven years or thereabout and my father much the same. All her replies must have pleased Father Inire; and he was doubtless returning to his apartments in our Hypogeum Apotropaic from some night-long deliberation with the Autarch. He took her with him; and so my father met them, as he often told me, in that white corridor we call the Luminary Way. Even then, when my father was only a child himself, he was struck by the sight of them walking and chatting together, Father Inire bent nearly double, like a gnome in a nursery book, with no more nose than an alouatte; Sancha already towering over him, straight as a sapling, sable of hair and bright of eye, with her cat in her arms.

Of what passed between them in Father Inire's apartments, I can only relay what Sancha herself told a maid called Aude, many years later. Father Inire showed the girl many wonderful and magical appurtenances, and at last that marvelous circle of specula by whose power a living being may be coalesced from the ethereal waves, or, should such a being boldly enter them, circumfused to the borders of Briah. Then Sancha, doubtless thinking it but a toy, cast her cat into the circle. It was a gray cat, so my father told me, with many stripes of a darker gray.

Knowing Father Inire as I have been privileged to know him these many years, I feel certain he must have promised poor Sancha that he would do all that lay in his power to retrieve her pet, and that he must have kept faithfully to that promise. As for Sancha, Aude said she

believed the cat the only creature Sancha was ever to love, beyond herself; but that, I think, was spite; and Aude was but a giddypate, who knew the Chatelaine only when she was old.

As I have often observed, rumor in our House Absolute is a self-willed wind. Ten thousand corridors there well may be (though I, with so many more immediate concerns, have forborne to count them), and a million chambers or more; and in truth no report reaches them all. And yet in a day or less, the least gossip comes to a thousand ears. So it became known, and quickly, that the girl Sancha was attended by some fey thing. When she and some friend sat alone at play, a pochette was knocked from a table and broken, or so it was said. On another occasion, a young man who sat conversing with Sancha (who must, I should think, have been somewhat older then) observed the ruffled body of a sparrow lying on the carpet at her feet, though she could scarcely have sat where she did without stepping upon it, had it been present when they began their talk.

Of the scandal concerning the Sancha and a certain Lomer, then seneschal to the Chatelaine Nympha, I shall say nothing—or at least very little, although the matter was only too well known at the time. She was still but a child, being then fourteen years of age, or as some alleged, fifteen. He was a man of nearly thirty. They were discovered together in that state which is too easily imagined. Sancha's rank and age equally exempted her from formal punishment; her age and her rank equally ensured that the disrepute would cling to her for life. Lomer was sentenced to die; he appealed to the Autarch, and as the Chatelaine Nympha exerted herself on his behalf, his appeal was accepted. He was sent to the antechamber to await a hearing; but if his case was ever disposed of, I do not recall it. The Chatelaine Leocadia, who was said to have concocted the affair to injure Nympha, suffered nothing.

When Sancha came of age, she received a villa in the south by her father's will, so becoming the Chatelaine Sancha. The Autarch Appian permitted her to leave our House Absolute at once; and no one was surprised, my father said, to hear soon after that she had wed the heir of Fors—it was a country family not liable to know much of the gossip of the court, nor apt to care greatly for what it heard, while the Chatelaine was a young woman of some fortune, excellent family, and extraordinary beauty. Insofar as we interested ourselves in her doings, she then vanished for the space of fifty years.

During the third year in which I performed the consequential charge which had once been my father's, she returned and requested a suite in the hypogeum, which Father Inire granted in observance of their old friendship. At that time, I conversed with her at length, it being necessary to arrange a thousand details to her satisfaction.

Of the celebrated beauty that had been hers, only the eyes remained. Her back was as bent as Father Inire's, her teeth had been made for her by a provincial ivory-turner, and her nose had become the hooked beak of a carrion bird. For whatever reason, her person now carried a disagreeable odor; she must have been aware

of it, for she had ordered fires of sandalwood to counter it.

Although she never mentioned her unfortunate adventure in our hypogeum, she described to me, in much greater detail than I shall give here, her career at Fors. Suffice it to say that she had borne several children, that her husband was dead, and that her elder son now directed the family estate. The Chatelaine did not get along well with his wife and had many disagreeable anecdotes to relate of her, of which the worst was that she had once denounced the Chatelaine as a *gligua*, such being the name the autochthons of the south employ for one who has traffic with diakka, casts spells, and the like.

Till that time, no thought of the impalpable cat said to accompany this old woman had crossed my mind; but the odd word suggested the odd story, and from that moment I kept the most careful watch, though I neither saw nor heard the least sign of the phantom. Several times I sought to lead our talk to her former relations with Father Inire or to the subject of felines per se—remarking, for example, that such an animal might be a source of comfort to one now separated by so many leagues from her family. The first evoked only general praises of Father Inire's goodness and learning, and the latter talk of birds, marmosets and similar favorites.

As I was about to go, Aude (whom I had assigned to the Chatelaine Sancha's service already, for the Chatelaine had brought but little staff with her from Fors) entered to complain that she had not been told the Chatelaine had a pet, and that it would be necessary to arrange for its food and the delivery of clean sand. The Chatelaine quite calmly denied she possessed such an animal and demanded that the one Aude reported be expelled from the suite.

As the years passed, the Chatelaine Sancha had little need of birds or marmosets. The scandal was revived by

doddering women who recollected it from childhood, and she attracted to herself a host of proteges, the daughters of armigers and exultants, eager to exhibit their tolerance and bathe in a notoriety that was without hazard. Rumors of a spectral cat persisted—it being said to walk upon the keyboard of the choralcelo—but there are many rumors in our hypogeum, and they were not the strangest.

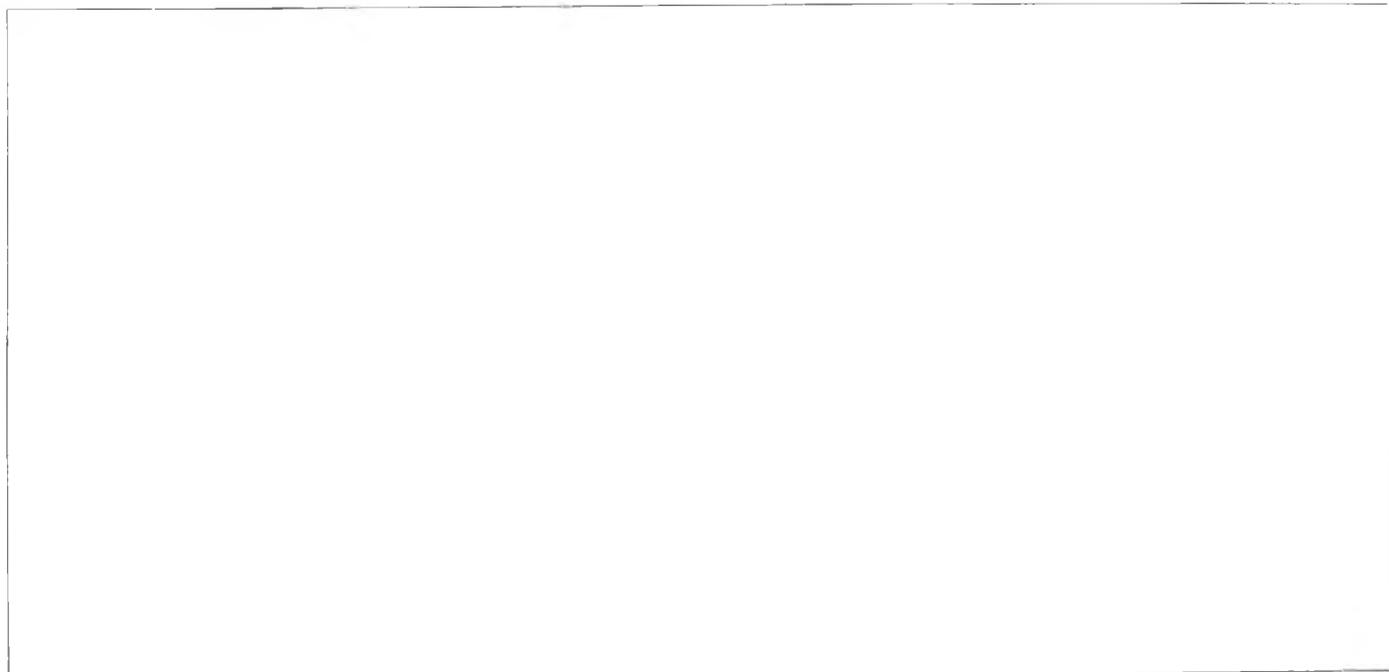
It is one of my duties to pay my respects, as the prolocutor of all Father Inire's servants, to those who endure their mortal illness here. Thus I called upon the Chatelaine Sancha as she lay dying, and thus I came to be in her bedchamber when, after having spoken with me only a moment before, she cried out with her final breath.

Having now carried my account to its conclusion, I scarcely know how to end it, save by an unembellished recitation of the facts.

At the dying Chatelaine's cry, all turned to look at her. And all saw, as did I, that upon the snowy counterpane covering her withered body there had appeared the dark pawprint of some animal, and beside it a thing not unlike a doll. This was no longer than my hand, and yet it seemed in each detail a lovely child just become a woman. Nor was it of painted wood, or any other substance of which such toys are made; for when the physician pricked it with his lancet, a ruby drop shone forth.

By the strict instructions of Father Inire, this little figure was interred with the Chatelaine Sancha. Our laundresses having proved incapable of removing the stain left by the creature's paw, I ordered the counterpane sent to the Chatelaine Leocadia, who being of the most advanced age was even then but dim of sight.

She has since gone blind, and yet her maids report that she sees the cat, which stalks her in her dreams. It is not well for those of high station to involve the servants of their enemies in their quarrels.



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WILLOW HE WALK

by

Manly Wade Wellman

As Lee Cobbett drove along the country road, he kept peering among dense trees until he saw a board nailed to a trunk with BINNS in big black letters. He stopped on the road's shoulder, got out and walked along a path between two leafy oaks. He was square-jawed, square-shouldered, wearing denim slacks and jacket, in his middle thirties. Beyond the oaks he saw a green yard and a squat house faced with yellow brick.

A lean man in chino slacks and tan shirt plied a hoe to clear frondy scrub from before the stoop. He turned his curly-bearded face to stare at Cobbett. "Yes?" he said. "What is it?"

"Good afternoon," said Cobbett, smiling. "My name's Cobbett. I'm looking for Roy Binns."

"Yes, sir, that's me." Eyes blinked above the beard. "Lee Cobbett? Yes, sir, I wrote to you. Come on inside."

He put down the hoe and opened the door. Cobbett walked into a front room cluttered with bookshelves, plaid-cushioned furniture, a sideboard, a desk and a typewriter. On the walls hung two ancient-looking maps and a landscape with a mill. Binns went to the sideboard. His hands trembled as he poured whiskey into two glasses.

"You're a famous expert on the supernatural," he said. "I wrote you when I couldn't find Judge Pursuivant. Didn't tell much in my letter, so you'd better have a drink to hear it all. Wait, I'll get some ice."

He bustled away to fetch back a bowlful, put cubes in the glasses and poured water from a pitcher. "Sit down," he bade, and gave Cobbett one of the glasses.

They both sat. "It's hard to start," he said unhappily. "In your letter," said Cobbett, "you hinted that a tree was doing strange things."

Binns drank deeply. "A willow. What do you know about willows?"

"Well, willow twigs make baskets and lobster pots, and the English use the wood for cricket bats. The Indians shredded willow bark into their tobacco to burn to cure sickness. Willows are supposed to keep snakes away. In the Bible—Leviticus, I think—there's something about

willow branches in ceremonies. And some Germans think you can kill an enemy by tying knots in willow sprouts. That last is as close to malevolence as I've heard about willows."

Binns cramped his whiskered face. "The one I cut down out there is as malevolent as hell."

"Yes?"

"I said I'd tell the whole thing. This place belonged to my father, and before that to my grandfather, who built it. Twenty acres, all in trees. My father and grandfather wouldn't cut a tree." A shuddery hike of shoulders. "My grandfather would walk his woods with a shotgun, ready to blast anybody who brought in an axe."

"I see," said Cobbett, silently admiring Binn's grandfather.

"They're both dead, and I inherited here. Then I got myself a sweetheart, a wonderful girl named Trix." He half-sang the name. "She left her husband for me, they're getting divorced, and she came here to live with me where we'd be left alone."

"Recluses?" suggested Cobbett.

"Call us that if you like. We were writing a play together. But Trix objected to the willow tree."

"What willow tree?"

Binns gestured shakily. "In the front yard. Trix said it gave her the creeps. Said willow meant black bad luck—friends had told her that. As a matter of fact, my grandfather was killed in an auto accident, and two big alimony suits didn't prolong my father's life—his heart stopped on him, one day at the office. So," and Binn's fist clenched, "I got an axe and chopped the willow down, and all hell broke loose."

"Tell me how hell broke loose."

Binns gulped. "That night there was a sort of storm. Tree branches drove against the window, broke a pane." He nodded to where a sheet of cardboard had been set to hide the breakage. "The house stood—it's solid brick and stone—but some shingles cracked on the roof. We were upset."

"Of course," said Cobbett. "Naturally."

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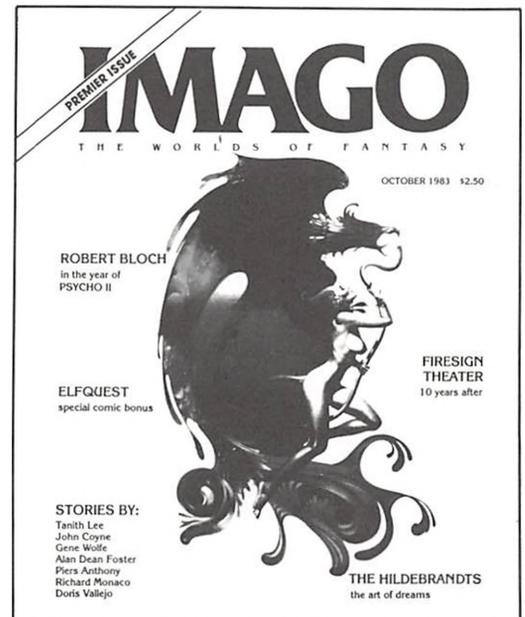
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"But it was unnatural," Binns squealed. "Next morning we went out to see the damage to the trees and—well, there wasn't any. No sign of a windstorm. Only the yard was grown all full of little willow scrub, overnight."

Cobbett frowned and set down his glass.

"Unnatural," said Binns agian. "I'd heard of Judge Pursuivant, how he can put a stop to unnatural things. I phoned, and he was away from his home town, Bucklin. But whoever answered gave me your address and said you'd helped Judge Pursuivant in the past, so I wrote to you."

"I got your letter yesterday, and here I am."

"But meanwhile!" Binns burst out. "Night after night of howlings outside, shovings at the house. And day before yesterday, after another night of it—"

He broke off. "Yes?" Cobbett nudged him.

"Lord God, it was unbearable. A siege, you can't imagine. But I slept somehow, and next morning—" His beard trembled. "Trix was gone. Drove off in her little car, I hadn't heard her. And not a word, not a note, not anything!"

Cobbett could think of nothing to say, and said nothing.

"She left me, and she was the loveliest, sweetest—" Binns wept. His shoulders shook and heaved.

"Will you be leaving, too?" Cobbett inquired at last. Binns's eyes stared. "I can't. What if she came back?" "Do you think she'll come back?"

"I don't know, don't know." The frantic head shook. "But if she does, I've got to be here for her, got to be here!"

Cobbett rose. "I'd better park my car somewhere else than in the road."

"Of course," said Binns. "Bring it around back. My pickup's there, and the place where Trix had her car—"

He began to shake again. Cobbett went out the door, feeling that it was wise to leave Binns alone for a moment.

He studied the yard for the first time. No grass there, but a growth of slender-leaved sprouts. He stepped into it. The stuff stirred as in a breeze, though there was no breeze. In the center of the space jutted a stump, dark-rinded, eight or ten inches across. Its upper end was white and raw-looking. He went to start his car and drove into a branch-bowered driveway. Behind the house stood a neatly kept blue pickup truck and, beside it, ruts where another car had been. Cobbett parked there, walked back into the yard and stood for a moment.

The green tendrils cloaked the open space. Cobbett looked for other willows. There were none. He saw a drooping elm, a rather gloomy oak, at the edge of things. He murmured aloud an ancient folk jingle from Somerset in England:

Elm he grieve, oak he hate,
Willow he walk if you stay out late . . .

Something nudged his foot. He looked down. He saw the raw stump of the willow; saw, too, that a leafy stem coiled there, looped around his ankle like a snake. Startled, he kicked free. He hurried, almost ran, to the door, glanced over his shoulder at the sky. The sun

drooped low. Not truly late, but it was almost evening And willow walked.

He was glad to get into the house and shut the door behind him.

"I see something of what you mean," he said to Binns.

"What willow means?" Binns asked dully.

"I told you I didn't think of willow as actively evil," said Cobbett. "It's more a symbol of sadness. Shakespeare puts willow into sad songs, in *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*. W. S. Gilbert joked about that in *Patience* and *The Mikado*, and somewhere in *The Bab Ballads*. But what you have out there creeps and threatens."

Binns blinked at him. "Do you want to leave? I'll stay here alone."

Cobbett managed a smile. "No, I'll stay with you. I came to help if I could."

"Let's have some supper," said Binns, more brightly. "I have some tins of things. How about corned beef hash with a fried egg on it?"

"That sounds fine."

Binns shuffled away to the back of the house. Cobbett looked out of the broken window, past the cardboard. The sun set in a gray sky. In the yard, the willow scrub stirred and rippled like water. *Willow he walk if you stay out late*, he said to himself, and went to the kitchen.

"It'll be ready soon," said Binns above his cooking. "Get us some butter from the refrigerator, and there's beer there."

They ate in the kitchen. Cobbett was hungry. Binns seemed to pick at his food. When they had done, Binns opened two more cans of beer. They went to the front room and Binns turned on a light.

"I've been thinking," said Cobbett. "Maybe there was a spirit in that willow you cut down."

"You believe such a thing?" demanded Binns.

"Maybe, I said. People believe in tree-spirits everywhere. The Indians respected them. And they were called dangerous in Europe, Asia, Africa. Everywhere," Cobbett repeated.

"That's called animis," said Binns. "A savage belief."

"But sophisticates like Pythagoras and Plato considered it. The notion that nature itself is a soul for everything. That notion includes trees and plants, gives them not only souls but minds and behaviors."

Binns scowled over the thought.

"That's not just primitive fancy," Cobbett elaborated. "A tree truly lives. It's born, it grows up, it reproduces. It can be successful in life, unless it's killed."

"And I killed this one, and I'm being punished," said Binns, and glanced toward the patched window. "The sun's gone down," he said miserably. "Hell will break loose again."

Cobbett sought the window. It was dusk, stars peeped. The trees beyond the yard seemed tense in the watch they kept. The scrub of willow in the yard looked longer, denser. It heaved strongly. Strands of it lay on the concrete stoop. Cobbett frowned, trying to remember something.

He fished a ballpoint pen from his shirt pocket. Carefully he made letters on the cardboard:

I
N I R
I
SANCTUS SPIRITUS
I
N I R
I

Let all this be guarded here in time, and there in
eternity. Amen.

He put the pen away and repeated aloud:

"Beneath thy guardianship, I am safe from all tempests
and all enemies."

Binns was staring. "What's all that for?"

"Two charms from a book called *The Long Lost Friend*," said Cobbett. "One written, one spoken, to
protect a threatened house."

"Isn't that a Pennsylvania witchcraft book?" said Binns.
"Listen, I've had about all the witchcraft I can stand."

"It's a good book, and I wish I had my copy here with
me," Cobbett tried to reassure him. "John George
Hohman, who wrote out its formulas long ago, was as
devout a man as you could call for. I've found *The Long
Lost Friend* to be a friend indeed. Since you won't
leave—"

"I'm staying here for Trix!" Binns cried. "She's gone—I
might as well die if she's gone."

"Well," said Cobbett evenly, "let's see if your tempest
is going to rise."

He stepped to the door. Outside he heard a sort of
whining, almost like a voice.

"You can't go out there!" protested Binns, out of his
chair.

"I'm going out," Cobbett said firmly, "and I'll come
back. Lock the door behind me. Don't open it until you
hear my voice. Ignore any knocks or thumps."

He turned the key, pulled open the door, and stepped
out into the evening.

There was no wind, only a soft, subdued whisper. He
had enough fading light to see by. The willow scrub lay
low and thick. He walked out to look at the raw stump.
It stood inches high, its chewed top looked milky pale.
The stump lived. It twitched like a wounded thumb.

Fronds crowded and huddled around Cobbett's feet.

"I didn't cut you down," said Cobbett aloud to whatever
might hear. "I've come to help. Maybe to help you as
much as to help the one who cut you."

A movement in the shadowy thicket at the yard's edge.
Something came his way.

A tree that walked—no, not a tree, it was too misty
for a tree. It was like the dream of a tree, with sagging
branches and long tussocks of leaves. It gave off the
faintest of glows.

Willow, the ghost of willow.

Cobbett kicked loose from withes that clutched his
shoes, and he ran for the door.

"Let me in!" he shouted.

The door flew open and he almost fell into the front
room. Binns slammed the door, turned the key with a
snap. Something pushed and strained against the stout

panels. Under the bottom of the door came a sudden
burst of sound, like the sniff of a great, searching beast.

"Not really a storm," said Cobbett.

Binns goggled. "If it's not a storm, what is it?"

Cobbett stood by the patched window, touched the
glass, felt no pressure there. "What I wrote on the card-
board works here," he said, and looked out.

The scramble of willow shoots rolled and tossed in
the yard, crept up on the stoop. He saw light, a pale
misty glow, from the dancing tree that tossed its
branches like arms. That was the felled willow tree, or
its ghost. It did not look big, it seemed to stand no taller
than Cobbett would. But it danced and gestured, directed
the assault of all those seedlings.

For these surged together, each with its own life, and
as they moved they seemed to grow larger, to increase
in number. The stout front door was being pressed. It
creaked on its hinges, it bulged.

"Thank God this house is made of stone and brick,"
mumbled Binns. "Wood would break. Thank God Trix
isn't here."

"You expect her to come back," said Cobbett.

"I don't expect a damned thing." Binns rose, tossed his
empty beer can into a waste basket and poured more
whiskey into their glasses. "Maybe a drink will help."

The front of the house shook. Binns spilled some of
his drink. Cobbett held his own as steady as a gun rest.

"You thought you killed a willow," he said, "but it
seems you didn't."

"I cut the thing down."

"Trees once ruled the Earth," Cobbett went on. "All
peoples know that. The Druids worshipped trees with
human sacrifice. A woodsman used to hesitate, maybe
pray, before he cut a tree."

"My grandfather would have prayed," said Binns. "My
father would."

The house shook, as if in the angry grip of giant hands.
A framed map swayed on the wall.

"You cut down that willow," Cobbett pursued. "I know
that your lady—Trix, you call her—made you do it, but
it was you who did it. And the willow resented it, it
rallied its children—all those wriggly seedlings—to tell
you so."

"I know, I know," Binns protested unhappily. "I mean,
I don't know. All I know is, I was wrong to do it."

The house rockéd and grated its bricks together like
teeth. Cobbett went to the window again. The frond's
billowed toward the house, light showed them to him,
though he could not make out what he thought of as the
willow's ghost. He said under his breath another phrase
from *The Long Lost Friend*:

"Make us safe from all enemies, visible and invis-
ible."

He hoped it would work, as in the past it had worked
for troubled people in Pennsylvania.

Again the house quivered. Cobbett wondered if the
stones and bricks were starting from their mortar.

"What can we do?" Binns stammered.

"We'll make it through tonight." Cobbett tried to sound
confident. "We'll hope the savagery doesn't get in here

to us. Tomorrow morning, when things quiet down, we'll go into town—"

"You'll go, you'll go alone. I'll wait here, Trix might come back!"

"All right," Cobbett soothed him. "I'll go alone. I'll try to round up some help for us. Judge Pursuivant, if I can locate him. Possibly somebody I know in the mountains, a man named John. That's the name he goes by, John. Maybe get a task force here against the task force that we're facing."

Binns sagged in his chair. "You think I'm a fool, talking about Trix. You don't know how beautiful she is."

"You aren't angry because she left you," ventured Cobbett.

"No, she's a woman. She was too scared to know what she was doing." He drained his glass and rose to pour himself another. "Women can't face fear like men. It's not woman's nature."

He drank. The house trembled. Cobbett thought of women he knew who had faced fear, but he said nothing about them.

Instead, he listened to the tumult outside. The spirit of the willow, the slaughtered willow, was abroad, rousing its army of sprouts. His written spell had baffled it somewhat. But for how long? Willow he walk, ran the old saying. Willow walked, willow hated, willow planned a revenge to visit upon the house and those inside. A demented rage out there, but not a mindless rage. The willow knew what it wanted to do.

The night passed like that, one crawling hour after another. Binns lay down on the sofa and slept fitfully. Perhaps the liquor he had drunk, and he had drunk a great deal, helped him sleep. Cobbett sat in his chair, wide awake. He listened to the turmoil outside, how it flowed at the house and then died down, as if weary for a moment. In his mind he marshalled every word of defensive mystery, spells and prayers, and said them under his breath as well as he could remember. Maybe his words had some effect. The house shook, but it stood. The stout door held, the prayer-protected window held, kept them sheltered within.

The troubled night seemed endless, but it ended. Faint rays of dawn seeped in at the window. Cobbett got out of his chair, and his movement wakened Binns.

"Well," Binns yawned, "We made it again. Wasn't it awful? What do you want for breakfast?"

They had coffee and canned orange juice and cereal, and then they went together to open the front door. There lay the swirled toss of the willow seedlings, looking bigger, ranker, denser than yesterday. The white jut of the stump stood among them, accusing them with its mutilation. It showed them that it was there, un-avenged, demanding vengeance.

"I'll be going," said Cobbett. "The sooner I start, the better."

Binns looked at him with wide, scared eyes. "You'll be back before night?"

"As fast as I can make it back. I'll make some phone calls in town, and perhaps I'd better buy us some supplies."

"Yes, yes," chattered Binns. "Do that."

A motor rippled out on the road. A little red car nosed into the driveway and stopped. Its door opened, out got a plump woman in green slacks and a figured green top. Binns rushed into the yard among the willow sprouts.

"Trix!" he squealed.

She hurried toward him. She had a round, rosy face, her short, fair hair stuck up in all directions on her head. She carried a brown paper bag. She and Binns flung their arms around each other.

"I knew you'd come back," Binns blubbered, with complete untruth.

She twitched out of his arms and held out the bag for him to see. She panted with exertion. She was somewhere in her thirties, apple-cheeked, full-mouthed. Cobbett could find none of the beauty in her that Binns had described.

"When you couldn't get Judge Pursuivant on the phone, I drove all the way to Bucklin," she said.

"He wasn't there," said Binns.

"No, but I found out that he was speaking at the State Culture Week thing. I went there to look for him. Last night after he spoke, I saw him, talked to him—found out just what to do—and I drove the rest of the night to get back here."

"I knew you would," vowed Binns again.

Cobbett walked into the overgrown yard.

"This is Mr. Cobbett, Trix," said Binns. "He's a friend of Judge Pursuivant."

"Oh?" said Trix, and blinked her round eyes. "Judge Pursuivant is the sweetest man—his hair's so white—and he knows everything!" She gestured. "He told me how to placate the willow. Look, he told me to bring these things."

From the bag she rummaged a bottle, then a jar. "Wine," she said, "and honey. The honey's for atonement, he said, and the wine's for friendship. And he taught me a charm to say to fix everything. You and I have to say it together, Roy. Here now, kneel down."

Binns lowered himself limply. Trix did the same. She had the top off the jar of honey and was pouring it on the willow stump. Then she muttered words, and Binns said them after her. She opened the wine bottle and carefully trickled some on top of the honey on the stump. That stump suddenly looked less accusingly white. It might be healing. And Cobbett was aware that the willow twigs drooped laxly around his feet.

Watching the two, he suddenly saw why Binns thought Trix was so beautiful.

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Sharon's first novel, **EARTHCHILD** gained her favorable comparisons to Le Guin, Asimov and Ellison. We'll publish the first rack-size edition of that novel in November, followed by the other two novels in *The Earth Song Triad*: **EARTH SONG** (March '84) and **RAM SONG**.

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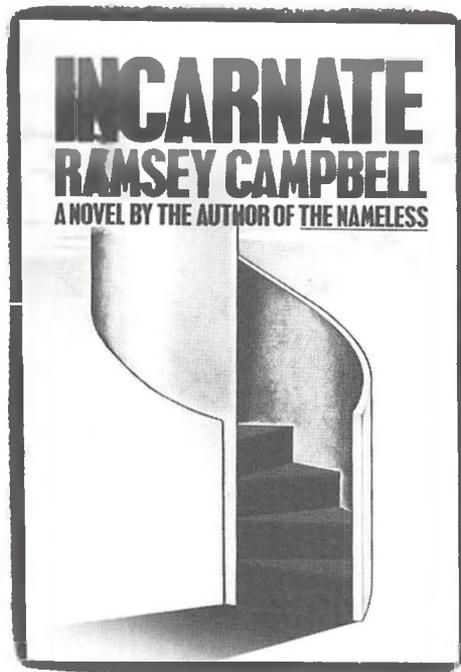
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(The following chapter from Ramsey Campbell's new novel, Incarnate, had to be deleted because of the length of the novel.

Thus, this appearance is its first, and probably only, time in print)

By way of synopsis? Molly Wolfe is one of five people who are the subjects of a project to monitor their tendencies to prophetic dreaming. Without warning they share a breakthrough to something so terrible they forget immediately. "For one appalling endless moment, everything was clear: both what would happen and what Molly would have to do to prevent it from happening." Eleven years later it begins, unnoticed by any of them, though Molly, now a television researcher, experiences a disturbing premonition on meeting Martin Wallace, a director with whom she subsequently works and falls in love. Meanwhile the other subjects of the project are unaware of the influence that is invading their lives, though one of them is convinced that Molly has caused his mental state since the project and means to make her pay for eleven years on the edge of insanity. Shortly before Martin has to return to America in order to try to make peace with his dying father, he receives a film which appears to show an actual incident of someone being killed by the police. Martin, whose documentaries have a reputation for being controversial, broadcasts the film, and so we come to the present chapter, which followed chapter fifteen in the published version.

It was late afternoon when Martin returned to Chapel Hill. Fall had turned the mountains all the colours of firelight and embers, but the fires were dying now. Leaves gathered in the long shadows of the Memorial Cemetery, drifted across the shopping plazas and the front yards on Franklin Street as the taxi cruised by. A truck loaded with windows swung off Franklin toward

Hoot Owl in Hidden Hills, and all the other names he had made into stories once as he rode on his father's shoulders came back to him: Fox Run and Possum Place and Wild Turkey on the far side of town, Tinkerbell Road straight out of *Peter Pan*, Gimghoul which he'd thought was Grimghoul, because he had been reading horror comics when the soda jerk wasn't looking. Mounds of

leaves sat in the empty amphitheatre, a daylight moon hung like a wafer of cloud in the blue sky above the Planetarium and made him think of Molly back in England, where night had fallen hours ago. He hoped they wouldn't use the Bennett film before he went back to England. Coming home for him to cope with.

Squirrels red as the bricks of the campus buildings scurried across the grassy quadrangle, white pillars gleamed in front of the Wilson Library and above the Old Well, gargoyles craned their crumbling necks. The taxi passed the sprawl of the Medical Center, and Martin was almost in Westwood. "I'll walk from here," he said.

When the taxi had murmured away, striped by the lengthening shadows, he walked down into Westwood. A few hundred yards and his pace slowed, so much was coming back to him: the narrow hilly streets that looped back on themselves, the faint scent of pine in the shade of the slim trees that grew in front of the two-storey houses, the English ivy that covered the ground of many of the yards. An old couple walked a small dog through the leaves where a sidewalk would have been, and the only sound was the whisper of footsteps. He wanted to stroll until the Indian summer evening kindled the porch lights, but he knew he was putting off his return home. When he reached it, he stepped down to the house.

The yard smelled like no other. Dogwood bushes sprouted from the ivy beneath the tulip poplars, but he could never quite locate the smoky scent that made him think of raked leaves and backyard fires and barbecues. Leaves covered the roof of his father's Ford at the side of the house, beyond which a frayed swing was still tied to a branch. He and Larry had sat on it years after they ought to have been too heavy, but it had always held. The sight of it made his throat close up. He managed to swallow and strode to the porch.

His mother answered the bell. Her delicate face was lined now, white china beginning to crack; her blue eyes looked bright with unshed tears. She hugged him on the porch, but not for long. "Come in," she said, with a fierceness that seemed ominous. "This is your home."

The years seemed hardly to have touched the living-room. The heating still sounded as if it harboured mice. The dark leather furniture was piled with books and papers now, but everything else was unchanged—his mother's mountain landscapes and his father's citations and diplomas on the panelled walls, the warm tobacco-smelling dimness that made him think of a clubroom. His father was levering himself out of his chair whose arms were grey with decades of spilled ash. His broad shoulders sagged very little. His shock of hair was even whiter than his moustache, his eyes were sharp as quartz, his face was deeply lined, old bark. His presence was so large that Martin was almost able not to notice he was leaning on a stick.

He looked Martin up and down, then he nodded to himself, unsmiling. Abruptly he stuck out his free hand. Martin grasped it—it was cold and rough and felt like a bundle of sinews—but his father let go after one hard shake. "Let's not pretend with each other. I'm too God-damned old for pretense."

"I'm not pretending."

"Then I've got one thing to say to you: I wonder why." He turned from Martin to his mother. "All right, let's get this shindy over with and then maybe we can talk."

"I'll tell them."

"In a pig's eye you will. I can still walk," he said, thumping the pine floor with the rubber tip of his stick, "and climb all the hills God made."

He shoved the stick under his arm and made for the porch, gripping the backs of chairs to support himself. Martin saw that he leaned on the stick once he reached the path. He hadn't realized he would find that so dismaying. He cleared papers from the chair by the window, Larry's chair that had been moved from the corner under the deer's head, and sat down. "What shindy?" he said.

"Just a few of our friends who've been missing you. Lester Craxton got his best chef to make the hors d'oeuvres. You know Lester, he'd have been hurt if we'd refused, and we invited a few people so he wouldn't feel out of place. It'll be like a real homecoming."

He noticed that she didn't try to tell him that it was. He glanced about at the books and papers. "What's happening here?"

"Your father plans to write his history of Chapel Hill now he's retired. I'm sure he could right now if he would only get started. Talk to him about it, Martin. Maybe he'll take notice of you now that you've achieved so much."

"Maybe."

"Talk to him anyway." She clasped his hands, pulled at them. "Promise me you won't fight any more. He can't take it any more, don't let him fool you into thinking he can. I don't want to lose him. We've lost enough."

Did she blame him for Larry too? "I haven't come home to make trouble," he said.

"I'm sure. We're all older and wiser now. Your father doesn't want to fight you either. He loves you, Martin, but he's afraid to let you see. You know that, don't you?"

"I guess."

"Be patient with him. Let him know you love him, you don't have to say it. You still do love him, don't you?"

"That's why I came home."

"Exactly what I told him."

Martin had to smile. "How did he take it?"

"Can't you just hear him? 'I don't need my own God-damned son to do me any favours.' But you're still his son, you see. He said that wasn't how he meant it, but you and I know better. It's going to be all right now, I know it is. I've been praying for this for years."

She let go of his hands at last and went to the window. "Lester must be giving him a drink before they come by the house. He won't listen to me or the doctor about drinking. Maybe he'll listen to you." She laughed nervously and surveyed the room. "That Lester, I've never known a man so shy. Even takes a drink before he can visit his own hotels. So much for your father clearing up his papers before the company arrives."

Martin was helping her stack the books and papers on the roll-top desk in the study when Martin's father and his friend came in. "God damn it, boy, I had those how I wanted them." When she pointed out that they'd kept

the piles separate he shrugged. "Don't let it gripe you. I don't even know if it's worth doing."

Martin saw a chance to make contact. "I feel like that sometimes."

His father stared at him. "You should."

Lester was lingering by the door, a bottle of vintage champagne in each hand, his face growing redder. "I just need to bring the hors d'oeuvres. There are a couple of trays."

"I'll help." Martin thought it best to walk away from the first skirmish. Streetlamps lit their canopies of branches, a breeze crept through the ivy, and Martin told himself as he carried a loaded tray down the hill that he must keep the peace. His mother was holding open the porch door for the other guests. Perhaps they would help.

"Martin, you remember Professor Fuller and his wife. And this is David Wess and—"

"Rosemary," the young woman said. She was twenty years younger than Wess and, clearly, unexpected. Her large brown eyes were gazing speculatively at Martin when Lisa Fuller said "Come on, Dorothy, we'll leave them to it" and herded them both to the kitchen, calling "We'll leave you boys alone except when we want a drink."

David Wess proved to have written two books that had been filmed and wanted Martin's advice about script-writing. Jonathan Fuller told Martin's father stories of the campus while Lester wandered about, leafing through books and peering at the mountain landscapes as if he had never seen them before, and at last reminded everyone diffidently about the hors d'oeuvres. "Lester, what must you think of us," cried Lisa, shooing everyone to the round oak table that was laid with Martin's great-grandmother's tablecloth. "Why don't you sit by our host," she said when Rosemary made to sit opposite Martin. "I want to hear all Martin's news."

"They tell me you direct movies in England," Rosemary said as his father opened the champagne. "Do you think I could get into them some day?"

"They're not that kind of film, dear," Dorothy said.

Rosemary ignored her. "I used to win all the acting prizes at high school."

"I just make documentaries."

"Well, David Wess, you might have made that clear. He never tells me anything, just sits at his big old desk switching his typewriter on and off. Can't even spare the time to show me round Chapel Hill." She leaned toward Martin and extended one bare arm from her filmy blouse for a glass of champagne his father was pouring. "Maybe you can show me something you think I'd like, Martin."

He found it easier to grin than speak. "Did you meet any nice English girls?" Lisa said.

"As a matter of fact I did." He glanced at his father. "I said I'd phone her later. I hope you don't mind."

"You should have brought her home with you," Lisa protested. "You fly her over to meet us all, you hear? And if Dick gives you a hard time, you just come and use our phone."

"I guess he'll do as he pleases," his father said, not looking at him.

"I guess he will, Dick Wallace, just like you. And I guess you wouldn't have much use for him if he didn't, am I right?"

Martin's father muttered something that Martin managed not to hear. "Well, Martin," Lisa said, "tell us all about yourself now you're famous."

"I think I'm pretty much the same as I used to be. Sometimes I feel out of my depth, especially now I'm working for television instead of for myself . . ." He told them as much as he could while the party demolished his mother's ham and pork roast and sweet potatoes, and realized how much he had to leave out: whatever he might have said about Lenny Bennett would simply have confirmed his father's worst opinion of him. At least he could say he would be filming in the House of Commons and tell them about Molly, but all at once the meal was over, Lisa was leading the parade of dishes to the kitchen and organizing Jonathan and David at the sink, and no time seemed to pass before she was ushering Lester away. "Shoo now, Lester, they want to be alone." Lester shook Martin's hand—"It's good you're back, Martin," he murmured quickly as if to outrun his shyness, "Dick and Dorothy's house feels like a home again"—and then everyone was leaving, until Lisa halted in the porch and shook a finger at Martin. "You stay now you're home, you hear? Fly your girl out here if she means as much to you as I think she does. And just you make him welcome, Dick Wallace. You know you want him to stay. You aren't fooling anyone except maybe yourself."

Martin's father closed the door when the path was clear. "I'm going to tell you, it's a good thing those folk are my friends, otherwise there's some of them would have me reaching for my shotgun as soon as they set foot on the path."

"Oh, Dick, do try for once in your life not to be such a grouch."

He stared at her, then he took her hand. "Don't mind me. You know good and well it was a damn fine party, you can cook the whole lot of Lester's Paree chefs out of the kitchen and stuff them too." He was guiding her toward the stairs. "You ought to get your rest now."

She glanced anxiously at Martin. "I don't mind staying up if you want to talk."

"Why don't you leave us to say what we have to say. Go ahead, we can take care of ourselves."

Martin saw that was what she was afraid of, but he felt almost at ease now. "We can talk in the morning," he told her.

"Well, all right. I am tired. Just be kind to each other." On the stairs she stopped to catch her breath. "Don't either of you drink too much."

His father lowered himself into his chair as if he were sitting down in a very hot bath. When at last he was seated he reached back and produced a bottle of Beam's Choice. "Do you use this or do you just drink wine like a woman?"

"I'd be glad to join you."

"I don't doubt it." His father's eyes narrowed. "Well, get the glasses. I guess you still know where they are."

Martin found the glasses in the cupboard next to the oven. His father was pulling up his trousers from the

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knees, and Martin saw how thin his ankles were now. The sight of the old man in the room that smelled like Martin's childhood—pipe tobacco, old books, his mother's delicate scent—released a flood of memories: his father and Larry competing to push him higher on the swing, his six-year-old shouts up in the branches; Larry shooting the white-tailed deer among the leaves that were beginning to glow yellow while Martin, even with his father's hands on the gun, had managed to shoot nothing but a tree-trunk; the moonshiner rocking on his porch deep in the mountains, ready to lean back and lift down his shotgun from inside the doorway. They'd rested by a stream on the way home, Martin's father hunkering down for a handful of water, sunlit drops glittering on his moustache. "I'm going to tell you what an old black man said to me once: Mr. Wallace, he said, when a man's got a wife like I got he don't need no French cook, he don't need no other friend when he got the blues, he don't need no other kind of woman a-tall. Well, I didn't stop until I found me a wife like that and don't you settle for less," he'd said, gazing at Martin. "That's what you're worth. Both of you," he'd added, almost quickly enough, and Martin could see Larry's instant self-deprecating smile, the rippling of sunlight on the water, stones shining through the ripples, until his father's voice broke in. "You going to be all night finding those glasses? At this rate I'll be dead before I get a drink."

He took a glass from Martin and tried to pour. Bottle and glass were trembling, clinking together, but when Martin made to hold the glass his father jerked it away, spilling bourbon down himself, "God damn it, when I want your help I'll tell you."

Nothing had changed between them. Martin felt his helpless rage beginning to crawl in his scalp. He mustn't lose his temper. He took the glass when at last it was filled and sipped it as he sat in Larry's chair. His father drained his own glass and gave a heartfelt sigh. "That's what I call a drink. I remember killing a litre one night with your brother. About time he came home."

Martin's eyes were stinging, and he didn't know what to say. "That Lisa Fuller," his father mumbled, refilling his glass. "Still has a mouth you could fall into, always had. Fall in and get lost until Thanksgiving." All at once he glared narrowly at Martin. "Well, what do you have to say to me?"

"I'm sorry," Martin said, and wished he could take his hand. "I hope we can still be friends."

"Sorry for what?"

After the way his father had spoken of Larry, Martin wasn't sure what to say. "Offending you, I guess."

"Offending me? Is that all you think you've done?"

"I hoped it might be after all this time."

"Hoped the old fool might be losing his memory is more like it. You'd better believe I remember, and I'm not likely to forget." He put down the Beam's Choice with a thud that almost knocked it over. "I remember having the police come here because of you, I remember how you went to college just to make trouble, I remember how you wouldn't fight for your country even after those God-damned slanteyes killed your brother. You've never even

visited his grave, have you? You put his name on that piece of shit you call a film instead. Sometimes when folks have asked after you I've wanted to go up in the mountains with my gun and end it right there."

"You wouldn't do that and you know it. You wouldn't leave my mother on her own."

"You're saying that to me? Why, you damned traitor, what do you think you've done except left her with nothing? You've pissed your life away and made us so we got to hoping people had forgotten you. You had everything going for you and Larry had nothing, but he achieved more than you ever will."

"I don't think my mother feels that way." The day that Larry had enlisted and Martin had returned to the peace marches she'd said that if Martin was forbidden to come back she would leave home too. "And Larry had a lot going for him. You just treated him as if he hadn't."

His father glared across the bottle and the glass. "How the hell do you know what she feels? You haven't seen her for years."

"Only because I thought I wouldn't be welcome."

"Then you were right for once. You aren't welcome now. If I had the strength I'd throw you out, mister."

Martin was cursing himself. "And you listen to me," his father said, setting the bottle down with a care that seemed threatening. "Don't you dare tell me how I treated your brother. At least I never wanted to get rid of him."

Martin stared. "Nor did I."

"Maybe you didn't know it, maybe you had that much of an excuse. Not much of an excuse at all. Listen here, you must have known, you were never that stupid. You must have known when you caused that scene that he would never come back. Or were you so God-damned self-righteous that you didn't even realize he thought it was his fault?"

It had been in this room. Martin had knocked his father down for calling Larry a dumb mechanic. The rage that felt like insects in his scalp had finally got the better of him, the years of being used against Larry had been all at once unbearable, expressible only as rage. He hadn't told Molly that, he was still too ashamed. "He had no reason to believe it was his fault," he said, and couldn't stop himself for anger. "And if he felt that any of us wanted to get rid of him, it wouldn't have been me."

His father's fist was clenching, and Martin was afraid the glass it held might break. "Why, you damned shit-eating pigfucker, are you telling me I did?"

"No, of course not. I'm sorry." Martin made to get up; words were worse than useless, they were dangerous; if only they could touch . . . "I know you couldn't have."

"Stay away from me. I don't want to fight you, because of your mother, but by God, I can still knock you down. Don't come crawling round me like the prodigal son. I've had years to think on what you did while you've been trying to forget, and I say that's why you've come back now, to make sure you get the house and everything."

"That's ridiculous. Look, maybe we should go to bed."

"That all you have to say? Can't sound like much, even to you. Well, let me tell you something so you'll know: I'd give this house to a nigra before I'd let you inherit it, and that's the truth."

"You don't know what you're saying," Martin muttered, and wished he hadn't spoken.

"The old fool doesn't know what he's saying? He knows enough to make a fool of you, boy. Want to know something? You thought I was getting senile when I said it was time he came home, didn't you? Why, you damned ninny, I said that to see how you'd react. I know he's dead, and by God I know who wanted him to die."

Martin wondered if he really had known all the time that Larry was dead, but it no longer seemed to matter. He drained his glass and stood up. "I hope you don't mind if I stay under your roof for the night. I'll leave in the morning."

"You'll sit there and listen to me, by God. I haven't finished." He lurched to his feet and made a grab for Martin with one hand, for his stick with the other. He missed both, and fell. Suddenly Martin saw him clearly, a dying old man trying to hold his mind together, finding little to hold onto except grief and helpless rage. He saw how alike they were, he glimpsed the extent of his father's loss. He stepped forward to help him up, unable to speak, but his father shoved himself back toward the chair. "I told you to stay away from me. I don't want you hanging around to watch me die."

He had his stick now, and heaved himself back into his chair. "One more thing before you go creeping off to bed. David Wess is a friend of mine. He didn't like you making eyes at his girl, and nor do I."

Martin halted at the foot of the stairs. "That's bullshit and you know it. I wasn't encouraging her, I was fighting her off."

"By God, you really think a lot of yourself, the world-famous film director every woman drops her pants for."

"That isn't what I meant and you know damn well it isn't. My impression of his girl was she'd rub up against a bedpost if she couldn't find a man."

"Well, I believe you're right." Suddenly, incredibly, there was the hint of a twinkle in his father's eyes. "But David doesn't see it that way, and I won't be the one to tell him. Just you keep away from her."

Before Martin could be sure of the look in his eyes, his father glanced toward the stairs. Martin's mother was halfway down them. "That's enough, Dick," she said, her voice trembling. "You've said enough. Just you come to bed."

"I'll tell you, Dorothy, I don't think he needs you to

fight his battles. I guess he can look after himself." He turned to Martin. "Well, we can't talk that way in front of your mother. Another night we'll do without all that God-damned wine. We can't leave things as they are now," he said ominously. "There are things that need to be talked out."

Nevertheless there had been grudging admiration in his voice, and as much of an invitation to stay as he was able to give. When his parents had closed their bedroom door, Martin went outside. Wind breathed in the trees, crickets in a shed sounded like a band of children playing combs. He sat on the swing, though the branch creaked, and felt there might be hope. Had anything besides his father's pretense of senility, if it was pretense, been meant to make him react? He could only wait for the morning.

He ought to go to bed, though he didn't feel tired. It was past two by his watch, sevenish in England. Would he wake Molly if he called now? After all, it was Saturday morning. Still, he thought she would want him to call, and he went in to the phone.

He had to dial three times before her phone rang. He shouldn't sound too optimistic in case his father overheard and thought that Martin felt he'd won. The phone had rung only once, startlingly close, when Molly demanded "Who's there?"

"Martin. How are you?"

"Oh, surviving. Are you home now? How did you get on with your father?"

"Better than I thought I would." He had lowered his voice, not only to say that but because he was growing uneasy; there was an edge to her voice he didn't like. "Everything all right over there?"

Her silence lasted so long that he was about to repeat the question. "No," she said across Atlantic waves of static, "but don't worry. We were acting in good faith, that must count in our favour. If we didn't take risks in our business we wouldn't be doing our job."

His scalp was crawling again. "What are you talking about? What's wrong?"

"Look, you mustn't worry. I wish I hadn't even mentioned it. I can handle it, trust me. You stay there as long as you need to and leave the situation here to me." At last she said "Ben Eccles used the Lenny Bennett film and what you said about it, and now it's proved to be fake."

ONE TO CHICAGO

by

Hugh B. Cave

"Today is Saturday?" Emma Jansen asked.

"All day," said Nurse Williams brightly. "Your granddaughter and her boyfriend will be coming."

Emma worked her legs over the edge of the bed and reached to the floor for her slippers—no easy thing to do when you were eighty-seven years old. "Not Andrew." She shook her head. "Susan, yes, but not Andrew. He won't be coming again."

"Of course he will." Nurse Williams pretended to be indignant. "Here. Let me help you with those."

"I can manage." Emma pushed the helping hand away and after a moment of struggle succeeded in pulling one slipper on. "No, Andrew won't be coming. He's gone to Chicago."

"Chicago? All that way? What for?"

"He was offered a new job there." Determination whitened Emma's lips as she struggled with slipper number two. That ankle was always stiff and painful in the morning now.

"You mean he won't be coming back?"

"That's what I mean. He won't be coming back."

"Well, I like that." Nurse Williams put her big, capable hands on her hips, the way she did when patients gave her an argument. "What about your granddaughter? They're engaged to be *married*."

Emma Jansen did not answer. When you didn't know what to say, it was best to say nothing. Holding onto the end of the bed, she pulled herself to her feet and waited for her legs to stop shaking. Then with a nod she said triumphantly, "All right, I'm ready."

They walked out of the room together and down the hall to the bathroom, the frail old woman holding the sturdy younger one's arm but disdaining the polished handrail that ran along the wall. But because they had talked about Susan and Andrew, and because Emma had taken so long to put on her slippers, they had missed their turn.

"What kind of job did the boyfriend go to?" Nurse Williams asked as they waited.

"It's a good one. He's to manage the Chicago office for his company."

Nurse Williams said "Huh!" and looked angry. Then she said, "Well, can't your granddaughter go out there too? Don't they need teachers in Chicago? They seem to everywhere else."

"I'm sure she could."

"But she won't, huh? Is that it? Because of you?"

"It's silly, isn't it?" Emma said.

This time it was Nurse Williams who chose the path of diplomacy through silence.

The bathroom door opened and a tall, hollow-faced woman came shuffling out unattended, jerking at the cord on her bathrobe. "Morning, Emma," she said. "Nurse, that new soap smells terrible. I hate it." Without waiting for answers she scuffed on down the hall and disappeared into her room.

"How old is she?" Emma asked, frowning after her.

"Ninety-three."

"I'm only eighty-seven."

"It's your legs; that's why we can't let you look after yourself. You're stronger than she is and a lot smarter. But your legs."

"They'd be all right if I used them more. I've told you."

"Now Emma. You know I have to follow orders."

"Wait for me out here," Emma said.

"Now—"

"Don't be silly. I'm not going to drown myself." Emma slapped the restraining hand away and went into the bathroom alone.

Nurse Williams, with a shrug, leaned against the wall and waited. Spunky old gal, she thought. It occurred to her, not for the first time, that she was getting old herself. She was fifty-one. Then she began to think about Emma Jansen's granddaughter Susan, and Susan's boyfriend Andrew, and said under her breath, "What rotten luck."

It was Susan who had brought the old woman here four years ago, Nurse Williams remembered. Emma herself had made the decision to come, but Susan had

insisted on looking the place over first. The old lady had no one else. Only Susan. Every Saturday afternoon for four years Susan had come to visit her. For the past year or so—maybe it was longer—Andrew had come too.

And now he's in Chicago, Nurse Williams thought. And she's stuck here when she should be with him. People shouldn't have such obligations.

Emma Jansen came out of the bathroom. Refusing assistance, she shuffled slowly but surely back to her room, with Nurse Williams, following, taking one step to her two. In her room she glanced uncertainly at the haven of the bed, stiffened her frail shoulders, and marched to a small painted desk where after a moment of indecision she began to rummage in the drawers.

"What are you looking for? Nurse Williams asked.

"A pen and some paper. To write a letter."

"Here. I'll help you."

"I don't need any help. Let me alone."

"All right, if that's what—"

"I don't want any breakfast, either. I'll do without."

"You have to eat breakfast," Nurse Williams said firmly, but got no answer. Emma had found her pen and paper and was at work.

She was still writing when Nurse Williams came with a tray, ten minutes later. She turned the letter over, ate quickly in silence, then impatiently pushed the tray away. "Take it. And don't come peering in at me. Close the door and leave me alone now until lunch."

Nurse Williams shook her head in mild reproach, but smiled too. And though it was against the rules, she did draw the door almost shut as she departed.

Her letter finished, Emma Jansen searched in the desk for her purse and opened it to be sure it contained money and her checkbook. Then she went to the closet for her clothes. She always dressed for her company on Saturdays. She insisted on it. Other days, because it was easier, she contented herself with a robe over her nightgown.

This morning she even put on shoes.

The hall was empty when she opened her door and looked out. Clutching her purse, she started down it. At each of the open doors—there were three—she halted and glanced quickly in to make sure the women were busy with their breakfasts before she stealthily hurried past.

At its end the hall turned to the right, and there was a big front door leading to the veranda. She had almost forgot the long gray veranda with its steps leading down to the lawn. Would she be able to manage the steps?

Taking them slowly, she voiced a little "Ha!" of triumph at the bottom. Nothing wrong with her legs; of course there wasn't. Briskly she marched across the broad green lawn to the road.

She was lucky. When she was only a block away from the home, a cab came in sight. She stepped to the curb and raised her hand. The cab stopped.

"Take me to the airport, young man."

"Sure thing, lady." He gave her an admiring grin as he shut the door for her. He had the kind of face she liked, honest and friendly, not too handsome. Like Susan's young man. With a little sigh of contentment she

settled back on the seat. It hadn't been so difficult, after all.

The driver spoke to her after a while. "You going on a trip, ma'am?"

"I'm going to Chicago."

"Chicago! Well, say, that is a trip. You going by yourself?"

"Indeed I am."

"Well, how about that?" he said wonderingly.

At the airport she handed him a ten-dollar bill and he walked her gently to the entrance doors, wondering why she had no luggage. Of course, maybe she lived in Chicago. Returning to his cab, he would have put the ten-dollar bill into his wallet but discovered he no longer had it.

Must have dropped it, he thought. Joe, you better pay less attention to nice little old ladies and more to business. Shaking his head in self reproach, he got out of the cab again and, peering at the sidewalk the whole way, walked back to where he had left the woman. But the bill had vanished. And that was strange. That was really strange. Because she had given it to him, he had held it in his hand while walking her to the door, and if any of the few people in sight had bent down to pick it up, he would have noticed.

There was no point in going after the woman. She hadn't picked it up, he was certain. Still shaking his head, and with a funny feeling that something strange was going on, he returned to his cab and drove away.

Emma carried the memory of his kindness with her into the airport—what a nice man he had been, so considerate and so like Susan's young man—but now she was tired. Before going to the counter for her ticket, she sought a place to sit for a moment.

She found one where it was quiet and there were no people: a bench in a corner, half hidden by a gay poster that showed a pair of young people on a beach lined with palm trees. They must be honeymooners to be so young and beautiful, she thought. Unobtrusively she made herself comfortable and closed her eyes.

It was a long time before the girl at the newsstand, wondering if something might be wrong, went over to speak to her.

"Are you all right, ma'am? Is there some way I can help you?"

Emma opened her eyes and smiled. "Oh, I'm fine, thank you. I'm just resting."

Satisfied, the girl went back to her newspapers and magazines. But when she happened to glance in Emma's direction less than half a minute later, she was puzzled. The bench was empty.

The girl looked up and down the concourse, with a feeling that something not quite natural was going on. It was impossible for the little old lady to have disappeared so quickly; there was just nowhere she could have disappeared to. Yet she was nowhere in sight.

But this is crazy, the girl told herself. She was sitting there and I spoke to her. I know I did. And I know she answered me.

At that very moment Nurse Williams strode into Emma Jansen's room at the home and said to the figure seated

there at the desk, "My goodness, Emma, are you still working on that letter?"

Getting no answer, she walked over and put a hand on Emma's shoulder. Very lightly, of course. Not with any pressure. But even the light touch caused the woman seated there to sway sideways. If Nurse Williams had not caught her, she would have fallen.

As Nurse Williams drew her favorite patient back to an upright position and realized she was holding a dead person, she happened to glance down at the last few words of the letter.

And so, Susan darling, she read, *I intend to get myself to Chicago right now, and you can follow me. Because that's where you should be, with the man you love, not here looking after an old lady whose life is finished.*

Please don't be annoyed with me, my dear. And if I don't get there, you are not to feel one tiny bit sorry for me, do you hear? I'll have had a grand time trying.

World of Weird, 1931 - 1932 (continued from page 25)

agency and playing the sedulous ape to Edgar Rice Burroughs, selling most of his work to Argosy. His things in *Weird* were popular enough, though they must have been Argosy rejects.

Another Orientalist, he knew Arabic enough to point out some of my misused expressions in *Golden Blood*. I don't remember what we ate that night, but we had exotic liqueurs—such as anisette—and what I recall most vividly is the fragrance of our piss when we went to the bathroom the next morning at the Y.M.C.A.

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THE MONSTER ON HOLD

by

Philip José Farmer

Introduction

The story following this introduction is a chapter in a projected novel originally titled *The Unspeakable Threshold* (now titled *The Monster On Hold*). This will be a “Doc Caliban” story and the latest in the series beginning with *A Feast Unknown* and continued in *Lord Of The Trees* and *The Mad Goblin*. *Feast* started in east Africa and is told in first person by James Cloamby, Viscount Grandrith (pronounced Grunith), an Englishman raised by a subhuman species (a variant of Australopithecus) in west Africa. Grandrith, while still a youth, became one of the high-echelon agents of the Council of Nine. The Nine are the secret rulers of Earth, most of whom were born circa 30,000-20,000 B.C. though they looked as if their age is only a hundred.

The Nine have considerably slowed their aging with a longevity “elixir” which they share with certain agents who have earned it. Grandrith is one of the very few so privileged. Though eighty-three, he looks and feels like a twenty-five year old man.

In *A Feast Unknown*, Grandrith is suffering unforeseen side effects of the elixir. These make it impossible for him to get an erection unless, and to avoid one if, violence is involved. He finds this out when he is attacked by Jomo Kenyatta’s forces. Then he discovers that an American agent for the Nine is out to kill him. Doc Caliban believes (wrongly) that Grandrith has killed Caliban’s cousin, Patricia Wilde, also an agent of the Nine. Caliban is suffering from the same side effects of the elixir.

Just as the two have what should be a final confrontation, they are summoned to a meeting of the Nine in a subterranean area in east Africa. The oldest man of the Council, XauXaz, has died, and Caliban and Grandrith are the two top candidates to replace him. One must kill

the other to get a seat on the Council. In the end of *A Feast Unknown*, after many adventures, the two almost kill each other, but they then unite to fight against the Nine.

In *Lord Of The Trees*, Grandrith manages to kill Mubaniga, the proto-Bantu member of the Nine. In *The Mad Goblin*, Jiinfan, a proto-Mongolian member and Iwaldi, an ancient Germanic member, are killed during a night battle at Stonehenge. Four of the Nine are dead, leaving as head of the Council Anana, the withered hag born about thirty thousand years ago in the area which would become Sumeria. Other living members are Tilatoc (an ancient Amerindian), Ing (the patronymic leader of the early English tribes when they were living in Denmark), Yeshua (a Hebrew born circa 3 B.C.), and Shaumbim (a proto-Mongolian).

The three novels above took place in the late 1960s. The events of *The Monster On Hold* begin in the late 1970s when Doc Caliban penetrates Tilatoc’s supposedly impregnable fortress hideout in northern Canada. I won’t describe the result because I don’t want to reveal too much about the novel. But Caliban goes into hiding again. He hears that Anana has decreed that whoever kills Grandrith and Caliban will become Council members even if they are not candidates. (Caliban almost loses his life when he gains this piece of information.) When the second section of the novel begins (in 1984), Caliban is in Los Angeles and disguised as an old wino. Tired of running, he’s decided to attack, but, first, he needs a lead. One night, a juvenile gang jumps him, thinking he’s easy prey. He disposes of them quite bloodily, but he spots a man observing the fight. Later, he sees the man shadowing him. After trapping him, Caliban questions him, using a truth drug he invented

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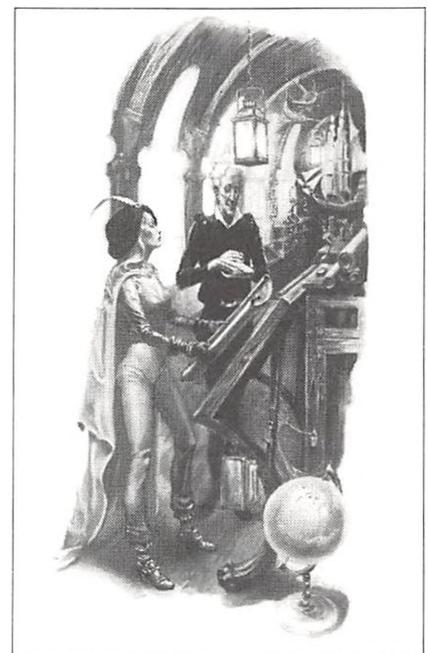
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in the 1930s. As Caliban suspects, the man is an agent of the Nine. Caliban allows him to escape and then trails him. This leads to a series of adventures I'll omit in this outline.

During these, Caliban begins to suffer from a recurring nightmare and has dreams alternating with these in which he sees himself or somebody like himself. However, this man, whom he calls *The Other*, also at times in Caliban's dreams seems to be dreaming of Caliban.

Caliban thinks he has shaken himself loose of the Nine's agents, but another appears. Caliban catches him and then recognizes him as a man he last saw in 1948.

He's shaken. The man, now calling himself Scott Free, figured prominently in an adventure which Caliban recalls with horror and much puzzlement. That is, when he does think about it, which is as seldom as he can help.

Caliban and his aides and some others had ventured deep into a labyrinthine cavern complex in New England. There they had encountered things which Mr. Free (one of the party) had said were the metamorphosed spirits of the dead. "Devils." Free claimed to be a lower-echelon devil who had escaped from Hades. Caliban, a rationalist and agnostic, did not believe Free's explanations. Yet, some of the events had no acceptable explanations. Whatever the truth, Caliban had escaped something very horrible. He had had no desire to explore the caverns again. At the same time, his scientific curiosity about them had tormented him from time to time.

The adventure had been thirty-six years ago, and here is Mr. Free looking as young as then and trying to make him his prisoner. By whose orders?

That of the thing which Free had implied was Satan? That of the Nine? Or was he trying to get Caliban on his own?

Doc gets into contact with his two aides, "Pauncho" Van Veelar and Barney Banks. They're living under assumed names in upper New York but come at once when Doc summons them.

The truth drug fails to work on Free, but Caliban forces a story out of him which seems to be true. At least, the instruments Doc uses indicate this. Free confesses that the story about the cavern being Hades and its inhabitants being doomed souls is false. But he was born in the middle of the eighteenth century, and he had worked for the Nine. Too ambitious, he doublecrossed the Nine to gain a vast fortune. Caught, he expected to be tortured and killed. Instead, he was condemned to be one of the guards in the cavern complex in New England.

There he discovered that he was to help guard something that he could only describe as "the monster in abeyance" or "the monster on hold." But it did have a name, *Shrassk*, meaning "She-Who-Eats-Her-Children." Free has never seen the monster. He says that in the eighteenth century the Nine were faced with a situation similar to that of Grandrith's and Caliban's revolt. Then, three candidates had tried to overthrow the Nine. They had so disrupted the organization, slain so many agents and candidates, come so close to killing some of the Nine, that the Council, in desperation, had summoned

a thing from another dimension or perhaps from a parallel universe.

(Not too parallel, Free says. Caliban says that things are either parallel or they're not. Free says that the other universe is, then, asymptotic. Which explains why the area in which the monster is contained in the cave is partly in this world, partly out of it. Or, from what he's heard, it may be suspended between two universes, acting as a sort of bridge.)

Shrassk, Free says, has the power, perhaps uncontrolled by it, a wild talent, to touch the subconscious of some sensitive human receptors and cause nightmares. God only knows what else.

Its touching may have been what caused Lovecraft to form his Cthulhu mythos, a dimly perceived and mostly fictional concept but based on the real horror.

In any event, *Shrassk* was not to be released directly upon the world in an effort to get the three rebels of the eighteenth century. While *Shrassk* was held in abeyance, it would reproduce after some mysterious mating and conception, and its "children" would be loosed to seek out and destroy the three without fail. Some children, that is.

Before that happened, the three rebels were caught, tortured, and then fed to *Shrassk*. It would not, however, go back to where it had come from. The Nine had to maintain the guards for the children and the forces that held it back from entering this world. Meanwhile, *Shrassk* was breeding, though very slowly, more of the children. Free says that *Shrassk* is imprisoned by geometry but, if it escapes, will do so by algebra. He is unable to clarify this enigmatic remark.

In 1948, Free had escaped from the cavern but had been forced to re-enter the cavern by Caliban and his aides. After they had gotten out of the cave, Free had teleported himself from jail. But teleportation is a power not always on tap. After a few "discharges," as Free puts it, the user has to recharge his battery.

Doc doesn't believe the story about TP. He thinks Free is lying and that he's just a superb escape artist.

Now, Free says, the Nine are so desperate that they are considering letting loose a "child" to destroy Grandrith, Caliban, Caliban's cousin, Pat Wilde, and Van Veelar and Banks. If that "child" doesn't succeed, another will be released.

Doc wonders if the truth drug isn't ineffective on Free and if Free hasn't been planted by the Nine to allure Caliban to go back to the cave. Nevertheless, he decides that he will attack. He gets into contact with Van Veelar and Banks and, after some difficulty, with his cousin, Pat. After taking the small stone fortress at the opening of the cave, the four descend into the many-leveled subterranean complex. This time, they penetrate much deeper than in 1948. They encounter a greater variety of denizens than the first time, including one which Doc thinks for a while is *Shrassk*. Doc becomes separated from his companions and has to go on alone.

The following is the first draft of a chapter of the proposed novel.

Free had said that the “children” were born out of flame by Shrassk. Why then, as Caliban had proved so many times in the past twelve hours, were they terrified by fire? Was it fire itself, the reality, or the idea of fire that panicked them? Or both? Or something else?

He crouched behind the seven-foot-high cone of dark brown stuff oozing from the wide crack in the rock floor. Its rotten-onion stink and his knowledge of its origin sickened him. That the cone was building up at the rate of a quart every five minutes meant that monsters like the one he had just killed were in the neighborhood. Unless, that is, the dead thing was excreting after death and its wastes were flowing through the undersurface fissure complex. No. This cone was too far from the carcass. Others of its kind must be nearby.

Soft noises came from the other side of the cone. Whisperings, chitterings. Nonhuman. He moved slowly along the edge of the cone. The gray-green light seemed to be dimming somewhat. Was the chocolate-brown goo absorbing the light? Nonsense. Or was it? He could not know here what was or was not nonsense. Anyway, calling something nonsense meant only that you did not understand it.

He looked around the cone. In the half-light he could see the rear of a creature he had not encountered so far. It had a tail two feet long, about an inch in diameter, hairless, studded with dark warts, and exuding slime. The tail was switching back and forth much like that of a cat thinking whatever sphinxlike thoughts a cat thought.

He moved slowly further around the edge of the cone, prepared to duck back if the thing should turn its eyes — if it had any — toward him. Then he saw that he had been wrong in assuming that the creature had a posterior part. It was two feet in diameter and a foot high. There was no head, hence, no rear, just an armored dome from which four tails — some kind of flexible members, anyway — extended. If the tail he had first seen came from the south of the round body, the others extended from the north, west, and east. The end of the west tail was stuck into the brown cone and was, since it was twice as large in diameter as the others, swollen with the sucking-in of the excrement.

Because the thing seemed to be eyeless, Caliban stepped forward two paces. Beyond the creature were four others, all feeding with the tail-like “west” organs.

Beyond them, its back to him — he supposed it was the back — was a bipedal creature. It was almost as tall as he and was unclothed. Though human in form, its skin was a dull blue. Black ridges ran both vertically and horizontally over its legs and body and hairless head. The ridges formed squares in the center of which was a livid red circle the size of a silver dollar. One hand, quite human, held a shepherd’s staff.

The whisperings and chitterings came from the “shepherd.”

The creature began to turn around. Caliban backed away around the cone. He looked around. No living thing in sight — as far as he knew. Here, he could not be sure what was or was not living. The rock floor slanted upwards at a ten-degree angle to the horizontal. At least,

what he thought was the horizontal. The only relief to the smoothness and emptiness were some tall rock spirals, huge boulders, and brown cones here and there. The warm thick air passed slowly over his sweating skin.

He walked in the opposite direction so that he could watch the shepherd while it was facing the other way. And then the flickerings began again — flickerings he knew now were not phenomena outside him — and he saw The Other, his near-double.

For a moment, he was frightened. Shrassk was touching his mind again. But, he reassured himself, that did not mean that Shrassk knew where he was. On the other hand. . .

He slid that possibility into a drawer in his mind and watched the vision with inner eyes while the outer watched the cone. If that shepherd strolled around the cone, it would have him at a disadvantage. He should go ahead with his plan. But he just could not move.

The man who looked so much like him was walking through a rock tunnel filled with the same light as this cavern, the gray-green of an old bone spotted with lichen. He, too, wore a backpack and a harness to which was attached many containers for instruments and weapons. Suddenly, The Other stopped. His expression shifted from intense wariness to fright. That quickly passed, and he stared straight ahead as if he were seeing something puzzling.

Caliban relaxed a trifle. The other man was probably also touched by Shrassk. He was seeing Caliban as Caliban was seeing him.

Caliban anticipated that they might soon do more than just see one another. It seemed to him that The Other was not perhaps in the same universe as Caliban’s. Not yet. Perhaps never. But Shrassk was in a third universe which was a bridge between Caliban’s and the Other’s. A crossroads. And Caliban and The Other could leave their two worlds to meet in the third, Shrassk’s.

This anticipation was based on Free’s explanation, which meant that neither was grounded in reality.

Doc forced himself to move. With the first step, the little glowing stage and its single performer vanished. It was as if his connection with the vision had been switched off by muscular action. By the time that he came to the other side of the cone, he was running and his mind was completely wrapped around his intent. A big knife was in one hand and the gas-powered pistol was in the other.

The shepherd had its back to him. It was turning one of the round things with its staff so that the tail on the south side could be inserted into the cone. Caliban slowed down just a little because he was astonished. The crook at the end of the shepherd’s staff was straight now. Its end had split into two, and these were clamped around the lower edge of the dome-shaped cone-eater. Using these, the shepherd was turning the thing so that it could insert another tail into the goo.

The checkerboard-skinned thing must have heard him or have felt the vibrations of Caliban’s boots through the rock floor and its bare soles. It yanked the staff from the edge of the round tailed thing and whirled. The ends of the staff merged together.

Caliban noted this and also the sex of the shepherd. It had no testicles, but a thin orange-prepuce penis reached to its knees.

The shepherd grinned, exposing four beaverlike teeth. Its face was human except for the black squares and red spots. It raised the staff as if it were going to throw it at Doc. The end nearest Doc swelled, the shaft shrinking in length and diameter as substance flowed into the end, and the end became a thin pointed two-edged blade.

Doc raised the gas pistol and squeezed the trigger. There was a hiss. The projectile appeared, its needle point buried in the blue chest. The thing staggered back two steps. It should have been unconscious in four seconds, but, screaming, it ran at Doc, the staff held as if it was a spear. Which it now was. The thing's arm came down; the spear flashed at Doc. He ducked. The spear missed, but the lower back end sagged, became supple, and whipped around Doc's arm.

Still holding the pistol, Doc sawed with his knife at the creature squeezing on his arm. Its body seemed to be as hard as hickory though it was as flexible as rubber.

By then the shepherd was upon him. Doc brought the knife up from the snake-shaft and down into the shepherd's thigh. The blade sank halfway into the flesh, but Doc was knocked down by the impact of its body. He rolled away and started to get up. The snake-shaft coiled the rest of its body around Doc's neck. He fell on his back, dropped the knife and pistol, and, while the thing cut his breath off, got his fingers between it and his neck, though not without cutting his skin with his fingernails, and, with a mighty yank, uncoiled it and cast it away.

Few men would have had the power to do that, but Doc had no time to congratulate himself on that. The shaft was writhing on the floor in an effort to reach him. Lacking the belly plates of the true snake, it was making little progress. The shepherd, however, screaming, blood gushing from its wound, was hobbling toward him. Doc rolled away until his right hand was within reach of the snake-shaft. His fingers closed around it just back of the head, which was swelling—toward what shape?—and he rose to his feet and threw the thing at the shepherd in one fluid movement. He had taken the chance that the staff might be so quick that it would whip itself around his wrist or even, perhaps, around his neck again. But, cracking it like a whip, he had avoided that. Now the shaft fell around the shepherd's head. The shepherd stopped, batted at the shaft, which had coiled around the head, chattered something, and the shaft fell off it.

Doc had hurled himself against the shepherd then, and he had knocked it down. It started to get up, but Doc's boot caught it under its rounded and cleft chin. It fell back, unconscious.

Panting, Doc bent over the shepherd. Since he wanted no witnesses left behind, no one to tell—whom?—that he had been this way, he intended to drag the shepherd to a nearby deep fissure and drop it in. He screamed and straightened up and grabbed at his crotch. Something had wrapped itself around his penis and was squeezing it. For a few seconds, he was so taken by shock and

surprise that he did not recognize what it was that had seized him.

Now he saw that the proboscislike sex organ of the shepherd—if it was a sex organ—had coiled itself around his penis. It was yanking at it as if it was trying to tear his organ off. Fortunately, the cloth of Doc's pants was interfering with the effort.

The shepherd seemed to be still knocked out. The drug from the hypodermic and its wound had surely done their work. But they should also have made its sex organ, or whatever it was, flaccid. Knocked it out, too. Unless it was partially independent of the blood supply of the main body.

No time to think. Gritting his teeth, Doc backed away, the shepherd's body dragging behind, pulled by the proboscis attached to Doc's penis. The pain became worse. He had a vision of his organ being torn out by the roots, but he kept backing until he was by the knife. He fell to his knees, grabbed it, and sliced away the blue length and orange prepuce with one motion. Blood, almost black in the dim light, geysered out from the shepherd.

"God Almighty!"

Doc staggered to the gas gun, picked it up, sheathed it and the knife, and ran. The pain faded away but not the memory. After a few yards, he slowed to a walk. A glance showed him the shepherd's still body, the shaft writhing, and the five round things. What next?

When he reached the far wall of the cavern, he went along it for perhaps a quarter of a mile and found in the shadows the entrance of a smooth downslanting tunnel. With both arms outspread, he could touch its walls. The top was a foot higher than his six feet and seven inches.

The tunnel, after a half a mile, ended with a flaring out as if it were a trumpet. Before him was silence and the biggest cavern yet. The walls opposite him were draped in blackness which, for a second, he thought moved. The ceiling soared into darkness. The floor, far below, was bathed in a brighter light than that which he had gone through and was now green-yellow. Its source, however, was still unknown.

A ledge extended from the tunnel exit. Two feet wide, it ran more or less horizontally from both sides of the tunnel mouth as far as he could see. The straight drop from the ledge to the floor was, he estimated, about a mile. From here, the floor seemed to be smooth among the ridges, hillocks, and curious shapes, some of which looked human. Vaguely. They could not be, however. For one thing, they did not move. For another, they would have to be far larger than elephants for him to make out their shapes at this distance and in this twilight.

For the first time, he saw water in large quantity. A river wound through a rock channel, its surface dark, smooth, and oily. Perhaps it wasn't water.

Something darker than the river and the stone banks moved slowly on the surface. Doc removed his backpack and took out the night-vision subsonic-transmitter. He lay down on the ledge, his elbows propped near the edge, put the viewscreen to his eyes, swept the area that

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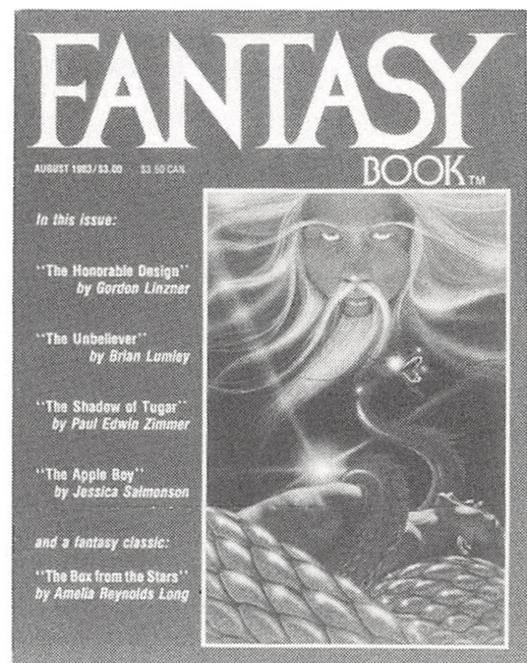
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had attracted his attention, adjusted the dials, moved the instrument back and forth, and held it steady.

The slowly floating mass was a rowboat with an unmoving figure seated in it. The figure seemed to have its back to him. But something extended from its front out over the water. A fishing rod? What kind of creatures could live in the barren river. There was no food for them. Unless . . . there were cracks in the riverbottom and the chocolatey onion-stinking stuff oozed up from them. Maybe the "fish" ate that stuff.

Doc moved the line of sight over the boat. It was white, though that may not have been its color. Objects on which the instrument focused looked white; objects near the edge of the screen and in the background were dark. He did not think that the boat was made of wood since wood was absent in this world. The boat had probably been carved from stone.

The fisherman could be of stone, too. He certainly had not moved any more than a granite statue would. If that were so, then the monk's cloak and hood on him was of stone, too.

Doc had to keep moving the instrument slowly because the boat, like the river, was moving sluggishly. Then he started, and he lost the boat for a moment. The fisherman had shifted. By the time that he was in the screen again, he was on his feet and holding the pole with both hands. The line from the pole was too thin for Doc's instrument to reflect, but Doc knew that there was a line. Proof of its existence was climbing out of the river on the line.

The thing ascending the line hand over hand had a ghostly-white face with enormous eyes. A snub human nose. Thick pale lips. A rounded chin. Under which hung a loose bladder of skin. The thing had a high and bulging forehead. If it had a head of hair, it was not visible. It had no ears or ear openings that Doc could see. The neck was fat, and the body was a baby's, the arms and legs very short. It stood swaying, its nonhuman round feet with long webbed toes spread out on the stone bottom of the boat. The fingers were also long and webbed.

Doc widened the field of vision. The fisherman was three times as tall as the catch. If the former was six feet high, then the catch was two feet tall.

Doc's muscles tightened, and the back of his neck chilled. The fisherman had turned so that Doc could see the profile under the hood. It was human and familiar. That big hooked nose could be Dante Alighieri's.

Stop thinking like this, Doc told himself. That is not the centuries-dead Florentine poet. He—or it—is probably, no, certainly, not even human. Free's claim that the dead were reincarnated here was ridiculous.

Now the fisherman had put the pole down in the boat. Now he was picking up the large but slim fishhook at the end of the line and was walking carefully—didn't want to rock the boat—toward the creature that looked like a hybrid of baby and frog. Now he had grabbed its neck—the creature was not struggling—and had savagely driven the end of the hook through one side of the bladder below the neck and out through the other side.

Even then the creature was passive. Perhaps it was in shock, though Doc did not think so. Something in its attitude indicated that it was fully cooperating. And now the fisherman had tossed the creature into the water. He walked back to the pole, lifted it, and sat down, becoming again a stone-still Izaak Walton. The pole did not move, which meant that the thing on the hook was not struggling.

What was the prey for which the baby-frog would be bait? Anything big enough to swallow it would be too big for the simple Tom Sawyer fishing tackle to handle.

Getting answers here is secondary, Doc thought. I shouldn't be wasting time lying here and watching. I must be moving on. Besides, in this place, what I see from a distance, even with the viewer, may be quite different from what I'd see close up.

Nevertheless, he did not get up at once. The fisherman maintained his unhuman lack of movement, no wriggling, no looking around, no scratching of nose or hair. Only the boat and the river moved, and they did so very slowly. Nor had anything else moved except some shadows seen out of the corners of his eyes. When he looked directly at where the shadows had been, he saw only the pale dead-looking light.

Though he kept the viewer on the boat, with occasional sweeps across the floor, he could not help but think of other things. For instance, what was the ecosystem of this place? There had to be some kind of order here despite all the appearances of illogic and chaos. Everything he had seen had to be obeying or acting in accordance with a "law," a "principle." Everything had to be interconnected here as much as everything above it was. The "laws" of entropy, of energy input and output, conception, reproduction, growth, aging, and death had to operate in this deep underground. There had to be a system and an interdependent network.

What?

Doc vowed that, before he left here—if he did leave—he would at least have an inkling of the system. He would have some data on which he could theorize.

Finally he rose. He was ready to go on. But, lacking a parachute or enough rope, he could not get down or along the glass-smooth wall below the ledge. He could go to the right or the left on the ledge. One direction had to lead down to the cave floor. There was traffic from the lower levels to the upper, and, thus, this ledge was the highway. Perhaps both the left and right were used. He could not, however, afford the time to take one and find out that it petered out somewhere on the side of the immense bowl.

Take the left. Why? Because that was the sinister side. It seemed to him that the sinister would always be the right direction in this place. Chuckling feebly at his feeble pun, he began walking faster than caution recommended, his left shoulder brushing against the wall now and then.

After a quarter of a mile, the ledge began sloping gently downward. In an hour, he was halfway to the floor and above a roughly three-cornered opening in the wall into which the dark river flowed. By then the fisher-

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man had inserted his pole into a socket in the corner of the boat and was rowing back up the river. Were his oars also made of stone?

The ledge took Caliban to the other side of the cavern before it reached the floor. He stood there for a while and listened to the total silence, which was a ringing in his ears. The fear bell ringing, he thought. Someone is at the front door and pressing on the button.

Though he had no reason to think so, he felt that he was getting close to his goal. Which perhaps explained why his fear had come back and was moving closer to that sheer hysterical horror he had suffered during an incident in his first venture into the cave so many years ago.

Caliban, your hindbrain is trying to take over, he told himself. Use your forebrain. Don't use it to rationalize and justify what your hindbrain is telling you. Don't turn and run away. Don't walk away, either. Push on ahead. If you flee now when you're so close, after you've gone through so much, you'll despise yourself forever afterwards. You might as well kill yourself. In which case, if you're going to die if you run away or die if you go ahead, you might as well, no, it'll be much better, if you die because you went ahead.

Despite this, the fire of panic was burning away his reason and courage. It might have caught hold of him and turned him around. He would never know because the vision of The Other sprang into light in some place in his mind. And, as fire fights fire, a cliché but sometimes true, the vision swept away the fear.

The Other was standing at the entrance to a cave. He was smiling and holding up one huge bronze-skinned hand, two fingers forming a V. Then the scene widened, and Doc saw that The Other was about three hundred feet from a great circle of stone symbols brightly lit by burning gas jets at their bases. There were nine: a Greek cross, a hexagon, a crescent, a five-pointed star, a tri-

angle with an eye at its top, a Celtic cross, an O with an X inside it, a snake with its tail in its mouth, and a winged horseshoe. They enclosed a shallow bowl-shaped depression in the rock about three hundred feet in diameter. In the center was another circle of stone symbols, smaller than those that formed the outer circle and unfamiliar to Caliban. Inside the smaller circle was a platform shaped like an 8 on its side. The upper side of the 8 had holes which projected to the far ceiling bright violet-colored rays.

Where the two O's that formed the 8 met, a strip of stone about ten feet wide, was a highbacked chair cut from a bloodred stone. The chair was not empty.

Caliban felt as if every cell in his body had turned over.

The being on the chair, surely Shrassk, She-Who-Eats-Her-Young, was not at all whom or what he had expected.

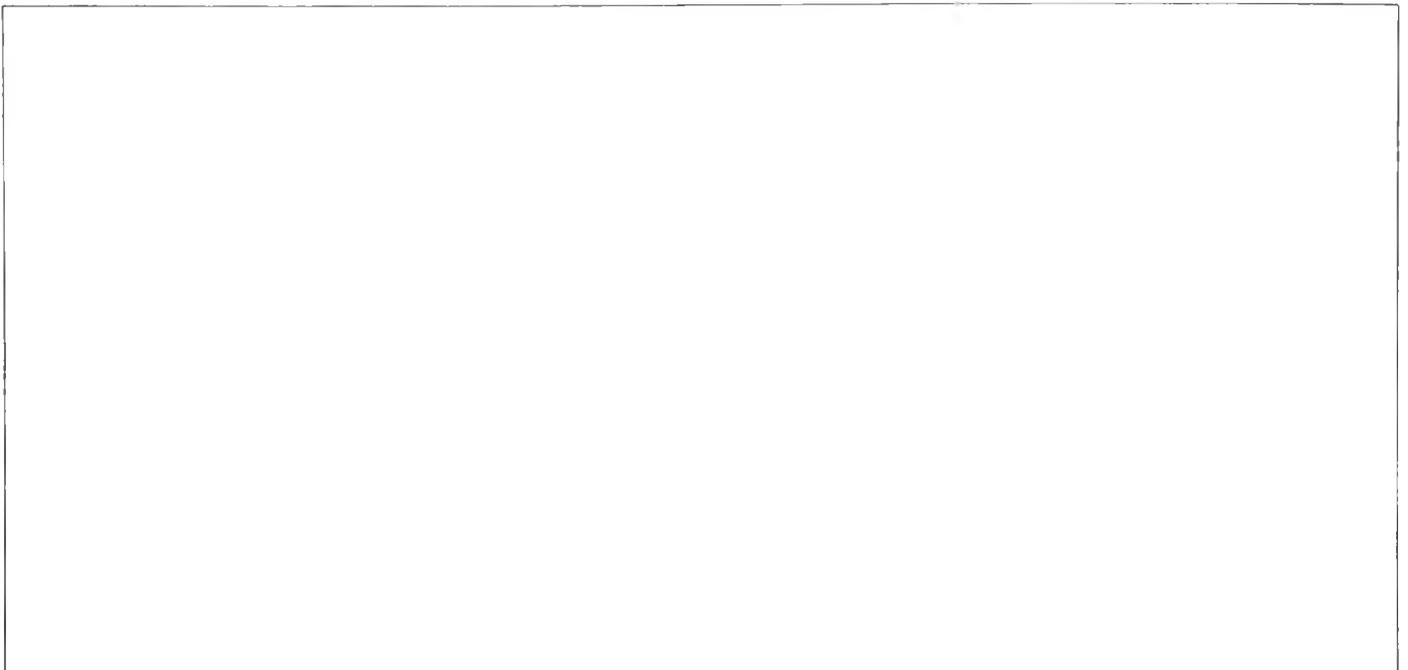
The fear surged back in; the vision dimmed. But he forced himself to push it back down, though it was like pressing down on a lid over a kettle of cockroaches breeding so furiously that the lid kept rising. For a moment, the vision became brighter and clearer. Doc saw that his Other was making signs in deaf-and-dumb language, indicating that his Other, Caliban, must hasten to aid him. Alone, each would go down quickly. Together, they might have a chance.

Caliban began running in a land where it was not good to run.

* * * * *

Thus ends this chapter. Will Caliban and The Other kill Shrassk? Or will they be lucky to get away with life and limb? Will both survive? Will Doc Caliban ever analyze the ecosystem of what might or might not be Hell?

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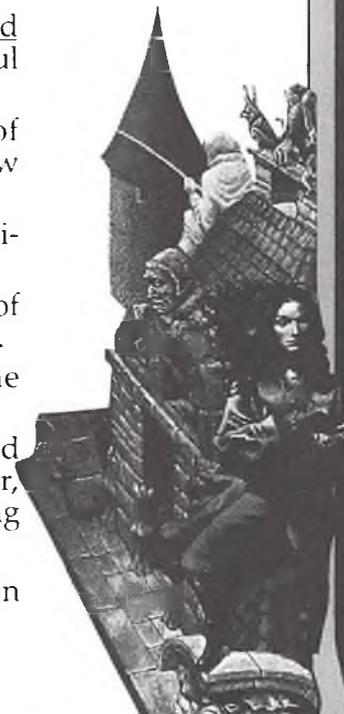
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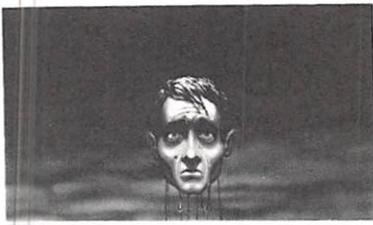
WITCHES—spins a new tale of a magic-plagued kingdom and the most dreadfully fuddle-headed sorceress you're ever likely to meet.

Megan Lindholm follows up her terrific first novel *HARPY'S FLIGHT* with *THE WINDSINGERS*, a new story about the taciturn gypsy woman Ki and her roguish lover Vandien—who have somehow gotten on the wrong side of the godlike creatures who control the winds. Canadian author Charles de Lint, who has gained a following with his short fiction (and his folk singing), makes his Ace Books debut with *THE RIDDLE OF THE WREN*. Shulamith Oppenheim, loved by young readers, turns to adult fantasy with a novel about a Scottish isle and a selchie maid. Two fantasy classics, Poul Anderson's *THREE HEARTS AND THREE LIONS* and John Bellairs' *THE FACE IN THE FROST*, come back into print. Robert Asprin's *THIEVES' WORLD* anthology series and Volume III of our own anthology series, *ELSEWHERE*, are in the works...and much, much more.

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We hope you'll enjoy the 1984 Ace Fantasy books, and find many enchanted hours therein.



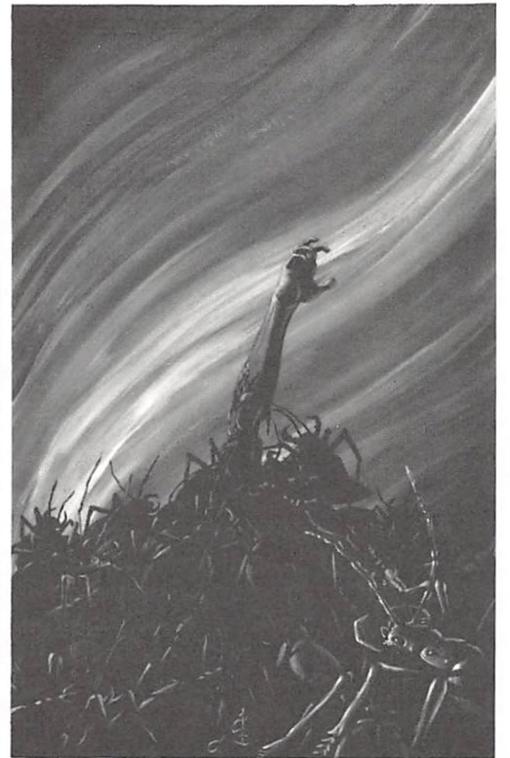
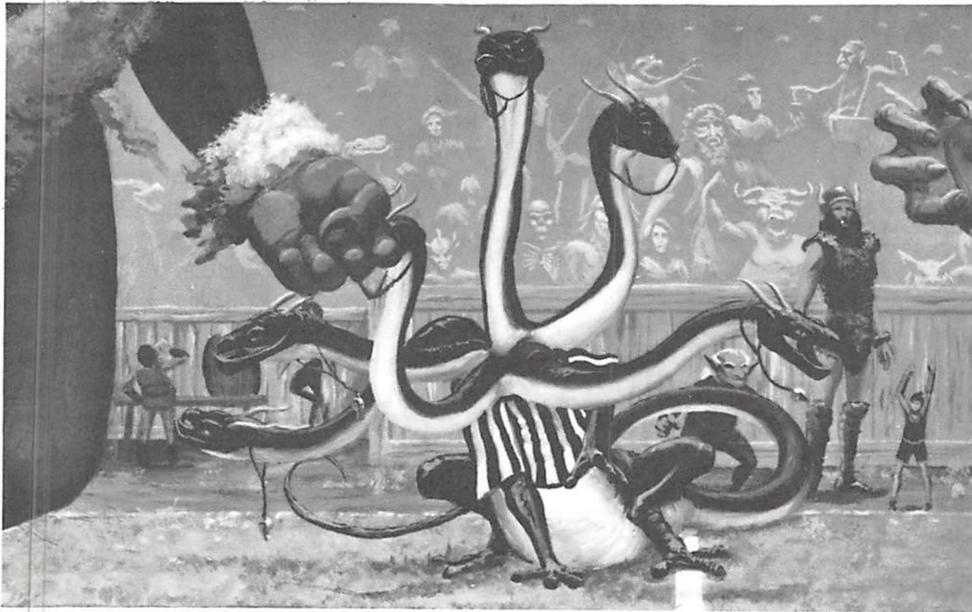
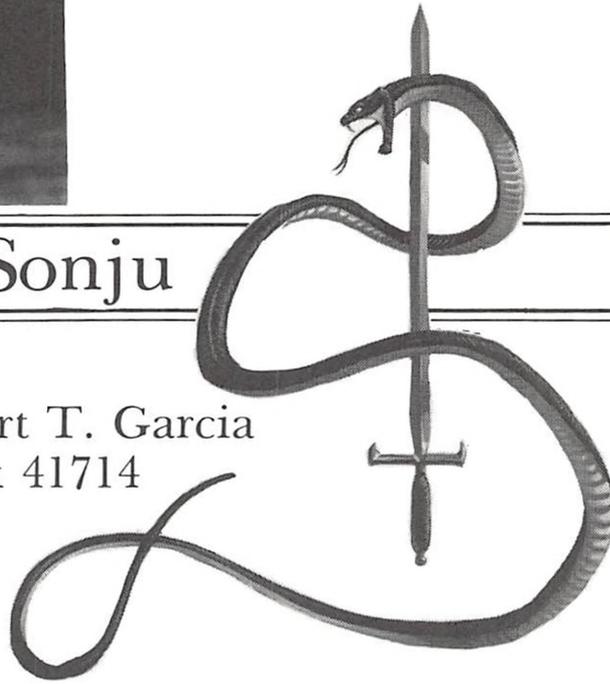


Paul Sonju

Illustrator

Contact: Robert T. Garcia
P.O. Box 41714

Chicago, IL 60641
(312) 383-2171



THE BLACK RECALLED

by

Brian Lumley

"Do you remember Gedney?" Geoffrey Arnold asked of his companion Ben Gifford, as they stood on the weed-grown gravel drive before a shattered, tumbled pile of masonry whose outlines roughly suggested a once-imposing, sprawling dwelling. A cold November wind blew about the two men, tugging at their overcoats, and an equally chilly moon was just beginning to rise over the near-distant London skyline.

"Remember him?" Gifford answered after a moment. "How could I forget him? Isn't that why we chose to meet here tonight—to remember him? Well, I certainly do—I remember fearing him mightily! But not as much as I feared this chap," and he nodded his head toward the nettle-and weed-sprouting ruin.

"Titus Crow?" said Arnold. "Yes, well we've all had reason to fear him in our time—but moreso after Gedney. Actually, it was Crow who kept me underground all those years, keeping a low profile, as it were. When I picked up the reins from Gedney—became 'chairman' of the society, so to speak, 'donned the Robes of Office'—it seemed prudent to be even more careful. Let's face it, we hadn't really been aware that such as Crow existed. But at the same time it has to be admitted that old Gedney really stuck his neck out. And Crow . . . well, he was probably one of the world's finest headsman!"

"Our mutual enemy," Gifford nodded, "and yet here we pay him homage!" He turned down the corners of his mouth and still somehow summoned a sardonic grin. "Or is it that we've come to make sure he is in fact dead, eh?"

"Dead?" Arnold answered, and shrugged. "I suppose he is—but they never did find his body. Neither his nor de Marigny's."

"Oh, I think it's safe to say he's dead," Gifford nodded. "Anyway, he's eight years gone, disappeared, and that's

good enough for me. They took him, and when they take you . . . well, you stay taken."

"They? The CCD, you mean? The Cthulhu Cycle Deities? Well, that's what we've all suspected, but—"

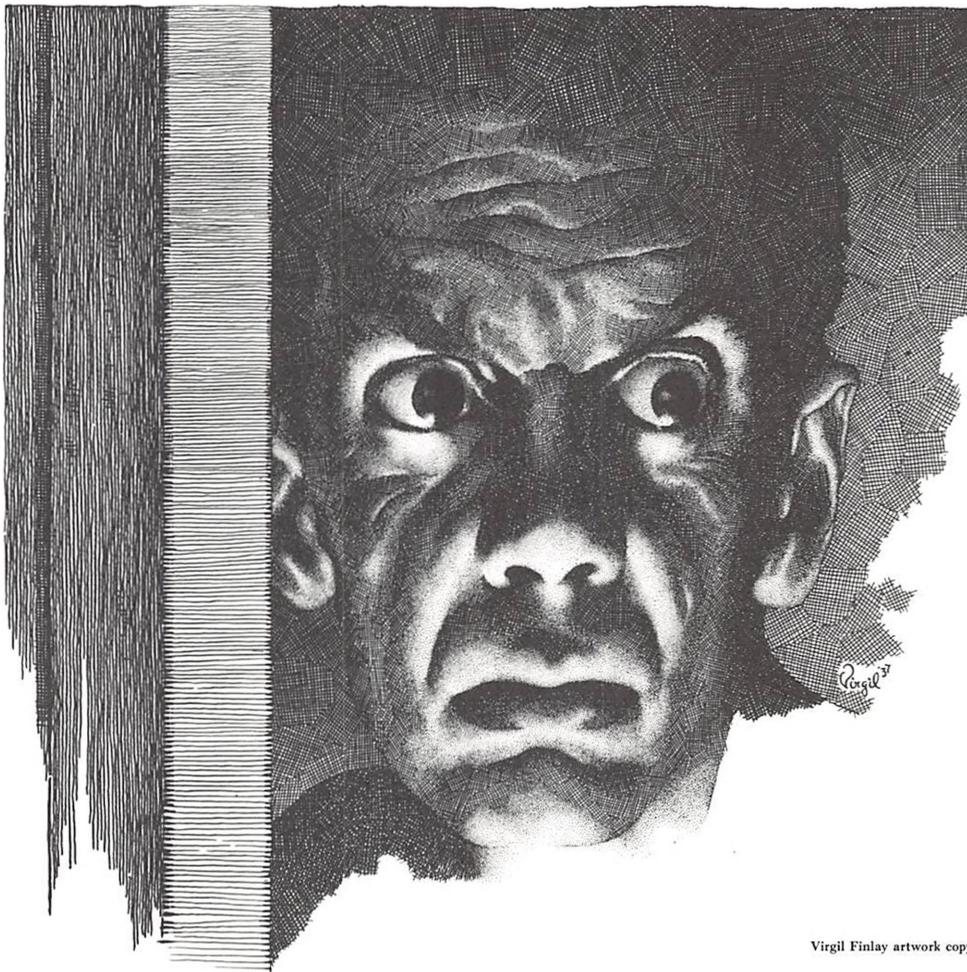
"Fact!" Gifford cut him short. "Crow was one of their worst enemies, too, you know . . ."

Arnold shuddered—entirely from the chill night air—and buttoned the top button of his coat just under his chin. Gifford took out and lighted a cigarette, the flame of his lighter flickeringly illuminating his own and Arnold's faces where they stood in what had once been the Garden of Blowne House, residence of the white wizard, Titus Crow.

Arnold was small, thin-faced, his pale skin paper-thin and his ears large and flat to his head. He seemed made of candle wax, but his eyes were bright with an unearthly mischief, a malicious evil. Gifford was huge—bigger than Arnold remembered him from eight years earlier—tall and overweight, whose heavy jowls were pock-marked in a face lined, roughened and made coarse by a life of unnatural excesses.

"Let's walk," the smaller man finally said. "Let's see, one last time, if we can't somehow resolve our differences, come to an agreement. I mean, when all's said and done, we do both serve the same master." They turned away from the ruined house, whose stone chimney stack, alone intact, poked at the sky like a skeleton finger. Beyond the garden, both lost in their own thoughts, they followed a path across the heath.

Arnold's mind had returned again to that morning eight years ago when, greatly daring, he had come to Leonard's-Walk Heath and passed himself off as a friend and colleague of Crow, actually assisting the police in their search of the ruins. For on the previous night Blowne House had suffered a ferocious assault—a



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“localized freak storm” of unprecedented fury—which had quite literally torn the place to pieces. Of Titus Crow and his friend Henri-Laurent de Marigny, no slightest trace; but of the occultist’s books and papers, remains aplenty! And these were the main reason Geoffrey Arnold was there, the magnet which had lured him to Blowne House. He had managed to steal certain documents and secret them away with him; later he had discovered among them Crow’s notes on The Black, that manifestation of Yibb-Tstll which years earlier Crow had turned back upon Arnold’s one-time coven-master, Moses Gedney, to destroy him.

Yibb-Tstll, yes . . .

Ben Gifford’s mind also centered upon that dark, undimensioned god of lightless infinities—his mind and more than his mind—and he too remembered Moses Gedney and the man’s use and misuse of black magic and powers born of alien universes. Powers which had rebounded in the end.

In those days Gifford and Arnold had been senior members of Gedney’s cult or coven. And they had prospered under the man’s tutelage and had shared his ill-gotten gains as avidly as they had partaken of his dark rites and demoniac practices. For Gedney had been no mere dabbler; his studies had taken him to all the world’s strange places, from which he rarely returned empty-handed. All the lore of elder earth lay in books, Gedney had claimed, and certainly his occult library had been second to none. But his power sprang from the way in which he *understood* and *used* those books.

It was as if, in Moses Gedney, a power had been born to penetrate even the blackest veils of myth and mysticism; an ability to take the merest fragments of time-lost lore and weave them into working spells and enchantments; a masterly erudition in matters of linguistics and cryptography, which would unlock for him even the most carefully hidden charm or secret of the old mages, those wizards and necromancers long passed into dust, whose legacy lay in Gedney’s decades-assembled library.

And uppermost in Gedney’s itinerary of research and study had been the pantheon of Cthulhu and the star-spawned Old Ones, lords and masters of this Earth in its prime, before the advent of mere man and before the dinosaurs themselves. For in those ages before memory Cthulhu and his spawn had come down from strange stars to a largely inchoate, semi-plastic Earth and built their cities here, and they had been the greatest magicians of all!

Their “magic,” according to Gedney, had been simply the inconceivable science of alien abysses, the knowledge of dark dimensions beyond the powers of men even to perceive; and yet something of their weird science had found its way down all the eons.

That would seem, on the surface, purely impossible; but Gedney had an answer for that, too. The CCD were not dead, he had claimed. Men must not forget Alhazred’s conjectural couplet:

*“That is not dead which can eternal lie,
And with strange eons even death may die.”*

—and Teh Atht’s much less cryptic fragment:

*“Where weirdly angled ramparts loom,
Gaunt sentinels whose shadows gloom
Upon an undead hell-beast’s tomb—
And gods and mortals fear to treat;
Where gateways to forbidden spheres
And times are closed, but monstrous fears
Await the passing of strange years—
When that will wake which is not dead . . .*

—in which the reference was surely to Cthulhu himself, dreaming but undead in his house in R’lyeh, ocean-buried in vast and pressured vaults of the mighty Pacific. Something had happened in those eon-hidden prehistoric times, some intervention perhaps of Nature, perhaps of alien races more powerful yet, whose result had been a suppression or sundering of the CCD; and they had either fled or been “banished” into exile from a world already budding with life of its own.

The regions in which the “gods” of the cycle had interred themselves or had been “prisoned” (they could never really die) had been varied as the forms they themselves had taken. Cthulhu was locked in sunken R’lyeh; Hastur in the star-distant deeps of Hali; Ithaqua the Wind-Walker confined to icy Arctic wastes where, in five-year cycles, to this very day he is still known to make monstrous incursions; and so on.

Yet others of the cycle had been dealt with more harshly: the Tind’losi Hounds now dwelled beyond Time’s darkest angles, locked out from the three sane dimensions; and Yog-Sothoth had been encapsulated in a place bordering all time and space but impinging into neither facet of the continuum—except should some foolhardy wizard call him out! And Yibb-Tstll, too—he also had his place . . .

But if these gods or demons of the conjectural Cthulhu Mythology were largely inaccessible to men, certain manifestations of them were not. Masters of telepathy, the CCD had long discovered the vulnerable minds of men and insinuated themselves into the dreams of men. On occasion such dreamers would be “rewarded,” granted powers over lesser mortals or even elevated to the priesthood of the CCD. In ancient times, even as now, they would become great wizards and warlocks. And Moses Gedney had been one such, who had collected all the works of wizards gone before and learned them, or as much of them as he might. Titus Crow had been another, but where Gedney’s magic had been black, Crow’s had been white.

Looking back now, Gifford could see that it had been inevitable that the two must clash. Clash they had, and Darkness had lost to Light. And for a little while the world had been a cleaner place . . .

“Do you remember how it all came to a head?” Gifford asked. “Crow and Gedney, I mean?”

The moon was fully up now, its disk silvering distant spires, turning the path to a night-white ribbon winding its way across the heath. And the path itself had grown narrower, warning that perhaps the two had chosen the

wrong route, which might well peter out into tangles of gorse and briar. But they made no effort to turn back.

"I remember," said Arnold. "Gedney had discovered a way to call an avatar of Yibb-Tstll up from hell. 'The Black,' he called it: putrid black blood of Yibb-Tstll, which would settle upon the victim like black snow, thicker and thicker, suffocating, destroying—and leaving not only a lifeless but a soulless shell behind. For the demon was a soul-eater, a wampir of psyche, of id!" He shuddered, and this time not alone from the chill of the night air. And his eyes were hooded where they glowed for a moment upon the other's dark silhouette where it strolled beside him. And in his mind he repeated certain strange words or sounds, a conjuration, ensuring that he had the rune right.

"Your memory serves you well," said Gifford. "He'd found a way to call The Black, all right—and he'd used it. I saw Symonds die that way, and I knew there had been others before him. People who'd crossed Gedney; and of course The Black was a perfect murder weapon."

Arnold nodded in the moonlight. "Yes, it was . . ." And to himself: . . . *And will be again!*

"Do you recall the actual machinery of the thing?" Gifford asked.

Careful—something warned Arnold—*careful!* He shrugged. "Something of it. Not much."

"Oh, come now!" Gifford chided. "Eight years as leader of your coven, and far more powerful now that Gedney ever was, and you'd tell me you never bothered to look into the thing? Had!" And to himself: *Ah, no, friend Arnold. You'll have to do better than that. Squirm, my treacherous little worm, squirm!*

"Something of it!" Arnold snapped. "It involves a card, inscribed with Ptetholite runes. That was the lure, the scent by which The Black would track its victim, Gedney's sacrifice. The card was passed to the victim, and then . . . then . . ."

"Then Gedney would say the words of the invocation," Gifford finished it for him. "And The Black would come, appearing out of nowhere, black snowflakes settling on the sacrifice, smothering, drowning, sucking out life and soul!"

Arnold nodded. "Yes," he said. "Yes . . ."

They had come to the end of the path, a bank that descended to a broad, moonlit expanse of water rippled by the light wind. "Hah!" Gifford grunted. "A lake! Well, we'll just have to retrace our steps, that's all. A waste of time—but still, it allowed us a little privacy and gave us the chance to talk. A lot has happened, after all, since I went off to America to start a coven there, and you stayed here to carry on."

They turned back. "A lot, yes," Arnold agreed. "And as you say, I am far more powerful now than ever Gedney was. But what of you? I've heard that you, too, have had your successes."

"Oh, you know well enough that I've prospered," Gifford answered. "My coven is strong—stronger, I suspect, than yours. But then again, I am its leader." He quickly held up a hand to ward off protests. "That was not said to slight you, Arnold. But facts speak for themselves. It wasn't idle chance that took me abroad.

I went because of what I knew I'd find there. Oh, we divided Gedney's knowledge, you and I—his books—but I knew of others. And more than mere books. There are survivals even now in old New England, Arnold, if a man knows where to seek them out. Cults and covens beyond even my belief when I first went there. And all of them integrated now—under me! Loosely as yet, it's true, but time will change all that."

"And you'd integrate us, too, eh?" the smaller man half-snarled, rounding on his companion. "And you even had the nerve to come here and tell me it to my face! Well, your American influence can't help you here in England, Gifford. You were a fool to come alone!"

"Alone?" the other's voice was dangerously low. "I am never alone. And you are the fool, my friend, not I."

In their arguing the two had strayed from the path. They stumbled on awhile in rough, damp turf and through glossy-leaved shrubbery—until once more the stack of an old chimney loomed naked against the moon. And now that they had their bearings once more, both men reached a simultaneous decision—that it must end here and now.

"Here," said Arnold, "right here is where Gedney died. He gave Crow one of his cards, called The Black and loosed it upon the man."

"Oh, Crow had set up certain protections about his house," Gifford continued the tale, "but they were useless against this. In the end he had to resort of a little devilishness of his own."

"Aye, a clever man, Crow," said Arnold. "He knew what was writ on Geph's broken columns. The Ptetholites had known and used Yibb-Tstll's black blood, and they'd furnished the clue, too."

"Indeed," Gifford mocked, "and now it appears you know far more than you pretended, eh?" And in a low tone he chanted:

"Let him who calls The Black
Be aware of the danger—
His victim may be protected
By the spell of running water,
And turn the called-up darkness
Against the very caller . . ."

Arnold listened, smiled grimly and nodded. "I looked into it later," he informed. "Crow kept records of all of his cases, you know? An amazing man. When he found himself under attack he heeded a certain passage from the *Necronomicon*. This passage:

". . . from the space which is not space, into any time when the Words are spoken, can the holder of the Knowledge summon The Black, blood of Yibb-Tstll, that which liveth apart from *him* and eateth souls, that which smothers and is called Drowner. Only in water can one escape the drowning; that which is in water drowneth not . . ."

"It was easy," Arnold continued, "—for a man with nerves of steel! While yet The Black settled on him in

an ever thickening layer, he simply stepped into his shower and turned on the water!"

Backing away from Arnold, Gifford opened his mouth and bayed like a great hound. "Oh, yes!" he laughed. "Yes! Can't you just picture it? The great Moses Gedney cheated like that! And how he must have fought to get into the shower with Crow, eh? For of course Crow must have given him his card back, turning The Black 'against the very caller . . .' And Crow fighting him off, keeping him out of the streaming water until The Black finished its work and carried Gedney's soul back to Yibb-Tstill in His place. Ah!—what an irony!"

Arnold too had backed away, and now the modern magicians faced each other across the rubble of Blowne House.

"But no running water here tonight, my friend," Arnold's grin was ferocious, his face a white mask in the moonlight.

"What?" Gifford's huge body quaked with awful mirth. "A threat? You wouldn't dare!"

"Wouldn't I? Your left-hand coat pocket, Gifford—that's where it is!"

And as Gifford drew out the rune-inscribed card, so Arnold commenced to gabble out loud that nightmarish invocation to summon Yibb-Tstill's poisoned blood from a space beyond all known spaces. That demented, droning, cacophonous explosion of sounds so well rehearsed, whose effect as its final crescendo reverberated on the heath's chill night air immediately began to make itself apparent—but in no wise as Arnold had anticipated!

"Fool, I named you," Gifford taunted across the rubble of Blowne House, "and great fool you are! Did you think I would ignore a power strong enough to snuff out a man like Gedney?" As he spoke his voice grew louder and even deeper, at the last resembling nothing so much as a deep bass croaking. And weird energies were at work, drawing mist from the earth to smoke upward in spiraling wreaths, so that the tumbled remains of the house between the two men now resembled the scene of a recent explosion.

Arnold backed away more yet, turned to run, tripped over moss-grown bricks and fell. He scrambled to his feet, looked back—and froze!

Gifford was still baying his awful laughter, but he had thrown off his overcoat and was even now tearing his jacket and shirt free and tossing them to the reeking earth. Beneath those garments—

—*The gross body of the man was black!*

Not a Negroid black, not even the jet of ink or deepest ebony or purest onyx. Black as the spaces between the farthest stars—black as the black blood of Yibb-Tstill himself!

"Oh, yes, Arnold," Gifford boomed, his feet in writhing mist while his upper torso commenced to quiver, a slithering blot on normal space. "Oh, yes! Did you think I'd be satisfied merely to skim the surface of a mystery? I had to go deeper! Control The Black? Man, I am The Black! Yibb-Tstill's priest on Earth—his High-Priest, Arnold! No longer born of the dark spaces, of alien dimensions, but of me! I am the host body! And you dare

call The Black? So be it . . ." And he tore in pieces the rune-written card and pointed at the other across the smoking ruins.

It seemed then that darkness peeled from Gifford, that his upper body erupted in a myriad fragments of night which hovered for a moment like a swarm of midnight bees—then split into two streams which moved in concert around the outlines of the ruins.

Geoffrey Arnold saw this and had time, even in his extreme of utter terror, to wonder at it. But time only for that. In the next moment, converging, those great pythons of alien matter reared up, swept upon him and layered him like lacquer where he stood and screamed. Quickly he turned black as the stuff thickened on him, and his shrill screams were soon shut off as the horror closed over his face.

Then he danced—a terrible dance of agony—and finally fell, a bloated blot, to the mist-tortured earth. For long seconds he jerked, writhed and twisted, and at last lay still.

Benjamin Gifford had watched all of this, and yet for all that he was a devotee of evil had gained little pleasure from it. Wizard and necromancer though he was, still he knew that there were far greater sources of evil. And for Great Evil there is always Great Good. The balance is ever maintained.

Now Gifford stopped laughing, his mouth slowly closing, the short hairs rising at the back of his neck. He sniffed like a hound at some suspicious odour; he sensed that things were far from right; he questioned what had happened—or rather, the way it had happened—and he grew afraid. His body, naked now and slenderer far than when The Black shrouded him, shivered in the spiralling mists.

Those mists, for example: he had thought them part of Arnold's conjuring, a curious side-effect. But no, for Arnold was finished and still the reeking, strangely twisting mists poured upward from the ruins of the old house. The ruins of Titus Crow's old house . . .

And why had The Black chosen to split and deflect around that smoking perimeter of ruin? Unless—

"No!" Gifford croaked, the dark iron vanished now from his voice. "No, that can't be!" It could not be . . . could it?

No slightest vestige of life remained in Arnold now. The Black lifted *en masse* from his body where it lay contorted in death's rigors, lifted like a jagged hole torn in normal space and paused, hovering at the edge of the ruins of Blowne House. And slowly that cloud of living evil formed into two serpents, and slowly they retraced their paths around the ruins.

Menacing they were, in their slow, *sentient* approach. And at last Gifford thought he knew why. Crow was long gone but the protections he had placed about Blowne House remained even now, would stay here until time itself was extinct and all magics—black and white—gone forever. The place was a focal point for good, *genius loci* for all the great benevolent powers which through all the ages men have called God! And those powers had not waned with Crow's passing but had fastened upon this place and waxed ever stronger.

To have called The Black here, now, in this place was a blasphemy, and the caller had payed in full. But to have brought The Black here—to have worn it like a mantle, to have been Yibb-Tstill's priest—that were greater blasphemy far. This place was sacrosanct, and it would remain that way.

"No!" Gifford croaked one last time, an instant before The Black fell upon him. Priest no more, he was borne under . . .

* * * * *

When the mists ceased their strange spiralling the ruins of Blowne House lay as before, silvered under a cleansing moon. Except that now there were corpses in the night. Pitiless shapes crumpled under the moon, where morning would find them chill as the earth where they lay.

But the earth would have a soul . . .

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Night's Master
and
Death's Master*

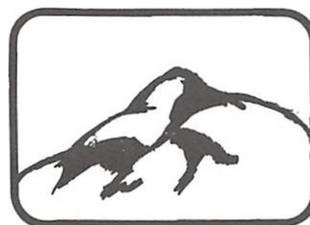
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NEITHER BRUTE NOR HUMAN

by

Karl Edward Wagner

The first time that Damon Harrington saw Trevor Nordgren was in 1974 at Discon II in Washington, D.C. It was the thirty-second World Science Fiction Convention, and Harrington's first convention of any sort. He and four friends had piled into a chugging VW van (still bearing a faded psychedelic paint job and inevitably dubbed "The Magic Bus") and driven approximately non-stop from Los Angeles; they were living out of the van in the parking lot of someone's brother who had an apartment on Ordway Street, a short walk from the con hotel.

They had been reading each other's name badges, and their eyes met. Harrington was of average height and build, with wheat-colored hair and a healthy California tan and good enough features to fit the Hollywood image of the leading man's best buddy. He had entered adolescence as a James Dean look-alike, emerged as a Beach Boy, and presently clung to the beard and pony-tail of the fading hippie years. Nordgren was half a head taller and probably ten pounds heavier, and only regular sit-ups could have kept his abdomen so flat. He was clean-shaven, with a tossed nimbus of bright blond hair, and blue eyes of almost unsettling intensity dominated a face that might have belonged to a visionary or a fallen angel. They were both wearing bell-bottomed jeans; Harrington sandals and a tie-dyed t-shirt, Nordgren cowboy boots and a blue chambray workshirt with hand-embroidered marijuana leaves.

Damon Harrington smiled, feeling extremely foolish in the silly styrofoam boater hat the con committee had given them to wear for the meet-the-pros party. Discon with its thousands of fans and frenetic pace was a bit overawing to the author of half a dozen published stories. He'd had to show his S.F.W.A. card to get his pro hat and free drink voucher, and already Harrington was kicking himself for not staying at the hucksters' room. He'd carried along a near-mint run of the first

dozen issues of *The Fantastic Four*, saved from high school days, and if he could coax one of the dealers out of a hundred bucks for the lot, he could about cover his expenses for the trip.

"Hey, look," Harrington protested, "I'm only doing this for the free drink they gave us for being put on display."

Trevor Nordgren tipped his styrofoam boater. "Don't forget this nifty ice bucket."

Harrington swirled the ice cubes in his near empty plastic cup, trying to think whether Trevor Nordgren should mean anything to him, painfully aware that Nordgren was puzzling over his name as well. An overweight teenage fan, collecting autographs on her program book, squinted closely at each of their badges, stumped away with the air of someone who had just been offered a swell deal for the Washington Monument. She joined a mass of autograph seekers clumped about a bewhiskered Big Name Author.

"God, I hate this!" Nordgren crunched his ice cubes. He glowered at the knots of fans who mobbed the famous authors. In between these continents of humanity, islands of fans milled about the many not-quite-so-big-name authors, while other fans stalked the drifting styrofoam hats of no-name authors such as Harrington and Nordgren. An ersatz Mr. Spock darted up to them, peered at their name badges, then hurried away.

"It would help if they just would give us t-shirts with our names printed across the back," Harrington suggested. "That way they could tell from a distance whether we were worth attention."

A well built brunette, braless in a t-shirt and tight jeans, approached them purposefully, selecting a copy of the latest *Orbit* from a stack of books cradled against her hip. "Mr. Nordgren? Mr. Harrington? Would you two mind autographing your stories in *Orbit* for me?"

"My pleasure," said Nordgren, accepting her book. He scribbled busily.

Harrington struggled over being "mistered" by someone who was obviously of his own age group. He hadn't read Nordgren's story in the book — had only reread his own story in search of typos — and he felt rather foolish.

"Please, call me Trevor," Nordgren said, handing the book to Harrington. "Did you read 'The Electric Dream?'"

"I thought it was the best thing in the book." She added: "I liked your story, too, Mr. Harrington."

"Is this your first con?" Nordgren asked.

"First one. Me and my old man rode down from Baltimore." She inclined her head toward a hulking red-bearded biker who had materialized behind Nordgren and Harrington, a beer bottle lost in one hairy fist. "This is Clay."

She retrieved her book, and Clay retrieved her.

"My first autograph," Harrington commented.

Nordgren was gloomily watching her departure. "I signed a copy of *Acid Test* about half an hour ago."

Recognition clicked in Harrington's memory: a Lancer paperback, badly drawn psychedelic cover, bought from a bin at Woolworth's, read one weekend when a friend brought over some Panama red.

"I've got a copy of that back in L.A. That was one far out book!"

"You must have one of the twelve copies that were sold." Nordgren's mood openly brightened. "Look, you want to pay for a drink from these suckers, or run up to my room for a shot of Jack Daniel's"

"Is the bear Catholic?"

When Nordgren poured them each a second drink, they agreed wholeheartedly that there was no point in returning to the ordeal of the meet-the-pros party. Nordgren had actually read Harrington's story in *Orbit* and pronounced it extremely good of its type; they commiserated in both having been among the "and others" on the cover blurb. They were both products of the immediate post-war baby boom; incredibly, both had been in Chicago for the bloody demonstrations during the Democratic primary, though neither had been wounded or arrested. Nordgren was in the aftermath of an unpleasant divorce; Harrington's lover of the Flower Children years had lately returned to Boston and a job with the family law firm. Nordgren preferred Chandler to Hammett, Harrington preferred Chandler's turn of a phrase; they agreed modern science fiction writers were nothing more than products of the market. The Stones and the Who were better than the Beatles, who actually weren't innovative at all, and listening to Pink Floyd while tripping had inspired at least one story from them both. Val Lewton was an unsung genius, to which ranks Nordgren added Nicholas Ray and Harrington Mario Bava, and Aldrich had peaked with *Kiss Me Deadly*.

They hit it off rather well.

Nordgren punished the bottle, but Harrington decided three drinks were his limit on an empty stomach, and concentrated on rolling joints from some leafy Mexican Nordgren had brought down from New York. They had both sold stories to *Cavalier*, and Harrington favorably

remembered Nordgren's one about the kid and the rubber machine in the redneck filling station. Harrington scraped along as cashier at an all-night self-service gas station, which afforded him lonely hours to write. Nordgren had been writing full time up until the divorce (he admitted to a possible cause-effect relationship here), and he was just completing his tenth novel — the second under his real name. Nordgren confessed to having paid the bills by writing several porno novels for Bee Line and Essex House, under the unsubtle pseudonym, Mike Hunt.

He was quite proud of the Essex House novels, which he said developed science fiction themes that Britain's New Wave would have deemed far too outrageous, and he produced a copy of *Time's Wanton* and incomprehensibly inscribed it to Harrington. It was about a woman who used her psychic powers to project her consciousness through time, Nordgren explained, emptying the bottle, and she took possession of various important historical personages and goaded them through extravagant sexual excesses that changed the course of history. It was, said Nordgren, a theme not dissimilar to his almost completed novel, *Out of the Past*, in which a Victorian medium projected her consciousness into the present day to control a teenage girl's mind. Harrington warned Nordgren that the market for fantasy novels was about nil, but Nordgren thought he could push the psychic powers angle enough to qualify as science fiction. Harrington allowed that his only novel to date had been a near miss — a post-nuclear holocaust thing sold to Powell Publications, a Los Angeles shoestring operation that folded with his *Iron Night* already in galleys.

It was a tough game, and they both agreed they considered themselves outlaws. Nordgren suggested they check out the parties for some free drinks, and Harrington suggested they look for something to eat. Somewhere along the way Nordgren ran into some New York friends and was carried off, and Harrington wandered into the night in search of a cheap pizza.

They managed to get together several more times in the course of the convention. Harrington found a three-year-old copy of *F&SF* containing what he considered his best story published to date, and he presented it to Nordgren in return for *Time's Wanton*. They exchanged addresses, agreed to stay in touch, and parted on the best of terms.

They actually did stay in touch, although correspondence was sporadic. Nordgren wrote long letters of comment on books and films he'd caught; Harrington was inclined to talk shop and discuss possible fiction markets. Nordgren kept him posted about his progress on *Out of the Past*, its completion, its rejection by various publishers. Harrington sold a short story to *F&SF* and was contemplating a major revision of *Iron Night* after having had it rejected by every publisher in the English-speaking world. Nordgren asked to read the manuscript, offered some badly needed criticisms ("Writing a short story all in the present tense may be artsy as hell, but an *entire* novel?"), and grudgingly Harrington followed some of his advice.

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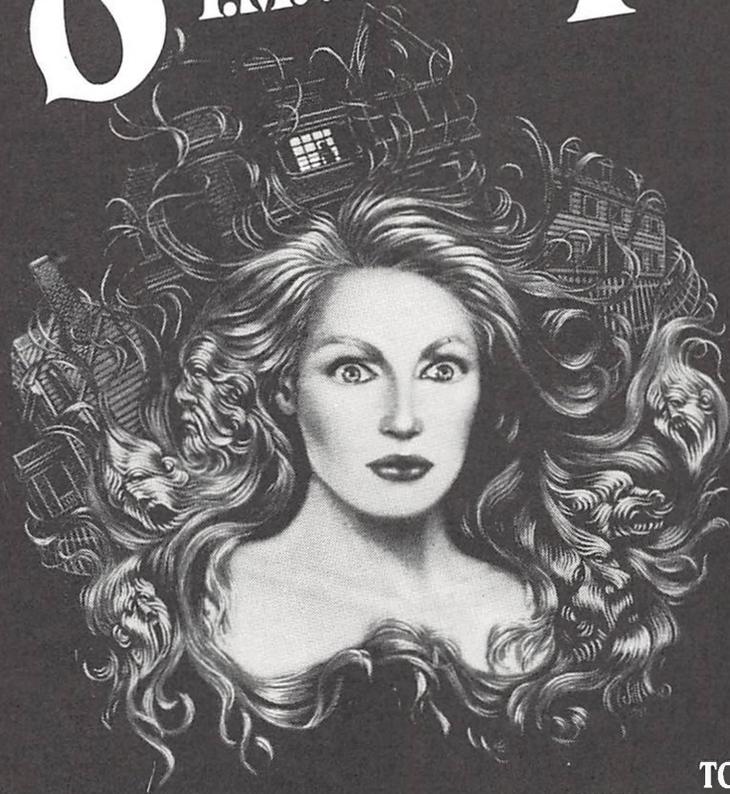
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On its second time out, the newly revised *Iron Night* sold to Fairlane, who expressed interest in an immediate sequel. The \$2500 advance was rather more than the sum total of Harrington's career earnings as an author up until then, and he was sufficiently assured of financial success to quit his job at the U-Sav-Here and send tidings to Nordgren that he was now a full-time professional writer. His letter crossed in the mail with Nordgren's; Trevor had just sold *Out of the Past* to McGinnis & Parry.

McGinnis & Parry elected to change the title to *The Sending* and went on to market it as "an occult thriller that out-chills *The Exorcist!*" They also proclaimed it to be Nordgren's first novel, but it was after all his first hardcover. Harrington received an advance copy (sent by Nordgren) and took personally Trevor's dedication to "all my fellow laborers in the vinyard." He really did intend to read it sometime soon.

They were very much a pair of young lions at the Second World Fantasy Convention in New York in 1976. Harrington decided to attend it after Nordgren's invitation to put him up for a few days afterward at his place (an appalling dump in Greenwich Village which Trevor swore was haunted by the ghost of Lenny Bruce) and show him around. Nordgren himself was a native of Wisconsin who had been living in The City (he managed to pronounce the capitals) since student days at Columbia; he professed no desire to return to the midwest.

They were together on a panel—Harrington's first—designated "Fantasy's New Faces"—although privately comparing notes with the other panelists revealed that their mean date of first publication was about eight years past. The panel was rather a dismal affair. The moderator had obviously never heard of Damon Harrington, introduced him as "our new Robert E. Howard," and referred to him as David Harrington throughout the panel. Most of the discussion was taken over by something called Martin E. Binkley, who had managed to publish three stories in minor fanzines and to insinuate himself onto the panel. Nordgren was quite drunk at the outset and continued to coax fresh Jack Daniel's and ice from a pretty blonde in the audience. By the end of the hour he was offering outrageous rebuttals to Binkley's self-serving pontification; the fans were loudly applauding, the moderator lost all control, and the panel nearly finished with a brawl.

That evening found Nordgren's state of mind somewhat mellow, if no closer to sobriety. He and Harrington slouched together behind a folding table at the meet-the-pros autographing party, while Nordgren's blonde cupbearer proudly continued her service.

"Together again!" Harrington toasted, raising the drink Nordgren had paid for.

"The show must go on," Nordgren rejoined. He looked about the same as he had two years ago, although the straining pearl buttons on his denim shirt bespoke a burgeoning beerbelly. Harrington had in the interim shaved his beard, trimmed his hair to the parted-in-the-middle-blown-dry look, and just now he was wearing a new denim leisure suit.

Fairlane had contributed two dozen copies of *Iron Night*, free to the first lucky autograph seekers, so for

about fifteen minutes Harrington was kept busy. He grew tired of explaining to unconcerned fans that the novel was set in a post-nuclear holocaust future, and that it was not at all "In the Conan Tradition!" as the cover proclaimed. After that, he managed to inscribe two copies of *New Dimensions* and three of *Orbit* over the next half hour.

Nordgren did quite a brisk trade in comparison, autographing a dozen copies of *The Sending* (on sale in the hucksters' room), as many copies of *Acid Test* (which had begun to gather a cult reputation), and a surprising number of short stories and essays from various magazines and anthologies. The room was crowded, hot, and after an hour Nordgren was patently bored and restive. In the jostled intervals between callers at their table, he stared moodily at the long lines queued up before the tables of the mighty.

"Do you ever wonder why we do this?" he asked Harrington.

"For fame, acclaim—not to mention a free drink?"

"Piss on it. Why do we put ourselves on display just so an effusive mob of lunatic fringe fans can gape at us and tell us how great we are and beg an autograph and ask about our theories of politics and religion?"

"You swiped that last from the Kinks," Damon accused.

"Rock stars. Movie stars. Sci-fi stars. What's the difference? We're all hustling for as much acclaim and attention as we can wring out of the masses. Admit it! If we were pure artists, you and I and the rest of this grasping lot would be home sweating over a typewriter tonight. Why aren't we?"

"Is that intended to be rhetorical?"

"All right, I'll tell you why, said he, finishing his drink." Nordgren finished his drink, dug another ten dollar bill out of his jeans, and poked it toward his cupbearer.

"It's because we're all vampires."

"Sweetheart, better make that two Bloody Marys!" Harrington called after her.

"I'm serious, Damon," Nordgren persisted, pausing to scrawl something across a copy of *The Sending*. "We're the psychic vampires beloved of fiction. We need all these fans, all this gaudy adulation. We derive energy from it all."

He handed the book back to its owner. "Have you read this?"

The fan was embarrassed. "No, sir—I just today bought it." He continued bravely: "But a friend of mine sat up all night reading it, and she said it gave her nightmares for a week!"

"So you see, Damon," Nordgren nodded. He pointed a finger at the fan. "I now possess a bit of your frightened friend's soul. And when you read *The Sending*, I shall possess a fragment of your soul as well."

The blonde returned bearing drinks, and the stricken fan made his escape.

"So you see, Damon," Nordgren asserted. "They read our books, and all their attention is directed toward the creations of our hungry imaginations. We absorb a little psychic energy each time they read us; We grow stronger

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Trevor squinted at the blonde’s name badge. “Julie, my love, how long have I known you?”

“Since we met in the elevator this morning,” she remembered.

“Julie, my love. Would you like to drop up to my room with me now and peruse my erotic etchings?”

“OK. You going to sign your book for me?”

“As you see, Damon.” Nordgren pushed back his chair. “The vampire’s victims are most willing. I hereby appoint you my proxy and empower you to sign anything that crosses this table in my name. Good night.”

Harrington found himself staring at two Bloody Marys.

The visit with Nordgren in New York was a lot of fun, and Damon promised to return Trevor’s hospitality when the World Fantasy Convention came to Los Angeles the following year. Aside from the convention, Harrington’s visit was chiefly remarkable for two other things—Nordgren’s almost embroiling them in a street fight with a youth gang in front of the Hilton, and their mutual acquisition of an agent.

“Damon, my man,” Nordgren introduced them. “Someone I’d like you to meet. A boxer needs a manager, and a writer needs an agent. There is Helen Hohenstein, and she’s the goddam smartest, meanest, and best looking agent in New York. Helen, love, this is our young Robert E. Howard.”

“I saw your panel,” she said.

“Sorry about that,” Harrington said.

Helen Hohenstein was a petite woman of about 40 whose doll-like face was offset by shrewd eyes—Harrington balked at deeming them predatory. She had passed through the revolving door in various editorial positions at various publishers, and she was now starting her own literary agency, specializing in science fiction and fantasy. She looked as if she could handle herself well under about any situation and probably already had. Harrington felt almost intimidated by her, besides not especially willing to sacrifice 10% of his meager earnings, but Nordgren was insistent.

“All kidding aside, Damon. Helen’s the sharpest mind in the game today. She’s worked her way up through the ranks, and she knows every crooked kink of a publisher’s subnormal brain. She’s already got a couple major paperback publishers interested in *The Sending*—and, baby, we’re talking five figures! It’s a break for us she’s just starting out and hungry for clients—and I’ve sold her on you, baby! Hey, think about it—she’ll buy all those stamps and manila envelopes, and collect all those rejection slips for you!”

That last sold Harrington. They celebrated with lunch at the Four Winds, and when Hohenstein revealed that she had read most of Harrington’s scattered short fiction and that she considered him to be a writer of unrealized genius, Damon knew he had hitched his wagon to the proper star.

A month later, Harrington knew so for a certainty. Hohenstein tore up Fairlane’s contract for the sequel to

Iron Night, wrote up a new one that did not include such pitfalls (unnoticed by Damon in his ecstasy to be published) as world rights forever and jumped the advance to \$3500 payable on acceptance instead of on publication. Fairlane responded by requesting four books a year in the “Saga of Desmond Killstar” series, as they now designated it, and promised not to say a word about Conan. Damon, who would have been panicstricken had he known of Helen’s machinations beforehand, now considered his literary career assured throughout his lifetime.

He splurged on a weekend phonecall to Nordgren to tell him of his success. Nordgren concurred that Hohenstein was a genius; she had just sold paperback rights to *The Sending* to Warwick Books for \$100,000, and the contract included an option for his next novel.

The Sending had topped the paperback bestseller lists for three straight weeks, when Trevor Nordgren flew first class to Los Angeles that next World Fantasy Convention. He took a suite at the con hotel and begged off Harrington’s invitation to put him up at his two-room cottage in Venice afterward. Helen was flying out and wanted him to talk with some Hollywood contacts while he was out there, so he wouldn’t have time for Damon to show him the sights. He knew Damon would understand, and anyway it was due to be announced soon, but Warwick had just signed a \$250,000 paperback deal for *The Rending*, so Trevor had to get back to New York to finish the final draft. McGinnis & Parry had put up another \$100,000 for hardcover rights, and Helen had slammed the door on any option for Nordgren’s next—that one would be up for bid.

Harrington could hear the clatter of loud voices as he approached Nordgren’s suite. A pretty redhead in a tank top answered his knock, sizing him up with the door half open.

“Hey, it’s Damon!” Nordgren’s voice cut above the uproar. “Come on in, baby! The party’s already started!”

Nordgren rose out of the melée and gave him a sloshing hug. He was apparently drinking straight Jack Daniel’s out of a pewter mug. He was wearing a loose shirt of soft suede, open at the throat to set off the gold chains about a neck that was starting to soften beneath a double chin, and a silver concho belt and black leather trousers that had been custom tailored when he was twenty pounds lighter.

Harrington could not resist. “Christ, you look like a peroxide Jim Morrison!”

“Yeah—Jimbo left me his wardrobe in his will. What you drinking? JD, still? Hey, Mitzi! Bring my friend James Dean a gallon of Jack Daniel’s with an ice cube in it! Come on, Damon—got some people I want you to meet.”

The redhead caught up with them. “Here you are, Mr. Dean.”

It was a stronger drink than Damon liked to risk this early in the afternoon, but Trevor swept him along. Most of the people he knew, at least recognized their faces. There was a mixed bag of name authors, various degrees of editors and publishers, a few people Harrington recognized from his own Hollywood contacts, and a mixture

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of friends, fans, groupies and civilians. Helen Hohenstein was talking in one corner with Alberta Dawson of Warwick Books, and she waved to Damon, which gave him an excuse to break away from Trevor's dizzying round of introductions.

"I must confess I've never read any of your Killstar books," Ms. Dawson felt she must confess, "although I understand they're very good for their type. Helen tells me that you and Trevor go way back together; do you ever write occult fiction?"

"I suppose you could call my story in the new *Black Dawns* anthology that Helen is editing a horror story. I really prefer to think of myself as a fantasy writer, as opposed to being categorized as a specialist in some particular sub-subgenre."

"Not much profit to be made in short stories." Ms. Dawson seemed wistful. "And none at all with horror fiction."

"I gather *The Sending* is doing all right for you."

"But *The Sending* is mainstream fiction, of course," she said almost primly, then conceded: "Well, *occult* mainstream fiction."

The Rending, it developed, was about a small New York bedroom community terrorized by werewolves. Nordgren's startling twist was that the werewolves were actually the town children, who had passed the curse among themselves through a seemingly innocent secret kid's gang. However Alberta Dawson would categorize the novel, *The Rending* went through three printings before publication at McGinnis & Parry, and the Warwick paperback topped the bestseller charts for twenty-three weeks. Harrington was no little amused to discover that the terrorized community included a hack gothics writer named David Harrison.

Fairlane Books filed for bankruptcy, still owing the advance for Harrington's latest Killstar opus and most of the royalties for the previous six.

"This," said Damon, when Helen phoned him the news. "is where I came in."

In point of fact, he was growing heartily sick of Desmond Killstar and his never-ending battles against the evil mutant hordes of *The Blighted Earth*, and had been at a loss as to which new or revived menace to pit him against in #8.

"We'll sue the bastards for whatever we can salvage," Helen promised him. "But for the good news: Julie Kriegman is the new science fiction editor at Summit, and she said she'd like to see a new fantasy-adventure series from you—something on the lines of Killstar, but with a touch of myths and sorcery. She thought the series ought to center around a strong female character—an enchantress, or maybe a swordswoman."

"How about a little of both?" Harrington suggested, glancing at the first draft of Killstar #8. "I think I can show her something in a few weeks. Who's this Kriegman woman, and why is she such a fan of mine?"

"Christ, I thought you knew her. She says she knows you and Trevor from way back. She remembers that you drink Bloody Marys."

Death's Dark Mistress, the first of the Krystel Firewind series, was good for a quick five grand advance and a contract for two more over the next year. The paperback's cover was a real eyecatcher, displaying Krystel Firewind astride her flying dragon and brandishing her enchanted broadsword at a horde of evil dwarves. That the artist had chosen to portray her nude except for a few certainly uncomfortable bits of baubles, while Harrington had described her as wearing plate armor for this particular battle, seemed a minor quibble. Damon was less pleased with the cover blurb that proclaimed him "America's Michael Moorcock!"

But Summit paid promptly.

Trevor Nordgren was Guest of Honor at CajunCon VIII in New Orleans in 1979, and Harrington (he later learned it was at Trevor's suggestion) was Master of Ceremonies. It was one of those annual regional conventions that normally draw three to five hundred fans, but this year over a thousand came to see Trevor Nordgren.

The film of *The Sending* had already grossed over 40 million, and Max de Lawrence was rumored to have purchased film rights to *The Rending* for an even million. Shaftesbury had outbid McGinnis & Parry, paying out \$500,000 for hardcover rights to Nordgren's latest, *The Etching*, and Warwick Books was paying a record two million for a package deal that gave them paperback rights to *The Etching*, Nordgren's next novel, and a series of five paperback reissues of his earlier work.

Nordgren was tied up with a barrage of newspaper and television interviews when Harrington checked into the Monteleone, but by late afternoon he phoned Damon to meet him in the lobby for a quick look at the French Quarter. Harrington was just out of the shower, and by the time he reached the lobby, Nordgren had been cornered by a mob of arriving fans. He was busily signing books, and for every one he handed back, two more were thrust toward him. He saw Damon, waved, and made a quick escape.

They fled to Bourbon Street and ducked into the Old Absinthe House, where they found seats at the hollow square bar. Nordgren ordered two Sazeracs. "Always wanted to try one. Used to be made with bourbon and absinthe, or brandy and absinthe, or rye and absinthe—anyway, it was made with absinthe. Now they use Pernod or Herbsaint or something instead of absinthe. Seems like they still ought to use absinthe in the Old Absinthe House."

Harrington watched with interest the bartender's intricate preparation. "Thought they were going to eat you alive back there in the lobby."

"Hell, let them have their fun. They pay the bills—they and a few million who stay at home."

Nordgren sipped the dark red cocktail that filled the lower part of a highball glass. "Hey, not bad. Beats a Manhattan. Let's have two more—these'll be gone by the time the next round's ready. So tell me, Damon—how you been?"

"Things are going pretty well. Summit has accepted *Swords of Red Vengeance*, and I'm hard at work on a third."

"He insinuates, he whispers; and then he pounces, and we are his. DEAD WHITE is a notable achievement."

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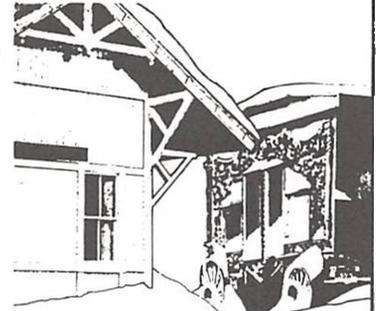
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"You're too good a writer to waste your energy on that sort of stuff."

"Pays the bills." Damon swallowed his Sazerac before he reminded Trevor that not all writers were overnight millionaires. "So what's after *The Etching*?"

Nordgren was already on his second Sazerac. "This one's called *The Bending*. No—just kidding! Christ, these little devils have a kick to them. Don't know what they'll want me to title it. It's about a naive young American secretary, who marries an older Englishman whose previous wife was lost when their yacht sank. They return to his vast estate, where the housekeeper makes life miserable for her because she's obsessed with her worship of the previous wife, and . . ."

"Was her name Rebecca?"

"Damn! You mean somebody beat me to the idea? Well, back to square one. Let's have another of these and go grab a quick bite."

"My round, I believe."

"Forget it—my treat. You can buy us dinner."

"Then how about a po' boy?"

"Seriously—I'd like that. Not really very hungry, but I know I've got to keep something in my stomach, or I'll be dead before the con is half over."

At a hole-in-the-wall sandwich shop they picked up a couple meatball po' boys to go. Harrington wanted to try the red beans and rice, but Nordgren was in a hurry to get back to the Monteleone. Fans spotted Nordgren as they entered the hotel, but they caught an elevator just in time and retreated to Trevor's room, where he ordered a dozen bottles of Dixie beer.

Nordgren managed half his sandwich by the time room service brought the beer. "Want the rest of this, Damon? I'm not all that hungry."

"Sure!" Harrington's last meal had been plastic chicken on the flight from Los Angeles. "Say, you're losing weight, aren't you?"

"My special diet plan." Nordgren unlocked his suitcase and dug out a chamois wallet, from which he produced a polished slab of agate and a plastic bag of cocaine. "Care for a little toot before we meet the masses?"

"For sure!" Damon said through a mouthful of sandwich. "Hey, I brought along a little Columbian for the weekend. Want me to run get it?"

"Got some Thai stick in the suitcase." Trevor was sifting coke onto the agate. "Take a look at these boulders, man! This shit has not been stepped on."

"Nice work if you can get it."

Nordgren cut lines with a silver razor blade and handed the matching tooter to Harrington. "Here. Courtesy of all those hot-blooded little fans out there, standing in line to buy the next best-selling thriller from that master of chills—yours truly, Trev the Ripper."

Trevor did look a good deal thinner, Damon thought, and he seemed to have abandoned the rock star look. His hair was trimmed, and he wore an expensive looking silk sport coat over an open-collared shirt. Put on the designer sunglasses, and welcome to Miami. Wealth evidently agreed with Nordgren.

"You're looking fit these days," Harrington observed

between snuffles. Damon himself was worrying about a distinct mid-thirties bulge, discovered when he shopped for a new sport coat for the trip. He was considering taking up jogging.

"Cutting down on my drinking." Nordgren cut some more lines. "I was knocking back two or three fifths a day and chasing it with a case or so of brew."

"Surprised you could write like that." Privately, Harrington had thought *The Etching* little more than a 200,000-word rewrite of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, served up with enough sex and gore to keep the twentieth century reader turning the pages.

"Coke's been my salvation. I feel better. I write better. It's all that psychic energy I'm drawing in from all those millions of readers out there."

"Are you still on about that?" Damon finished his lines. "Can't say I've absorbed any energy from my dozens of fans."

"It's exponential," Nordgren explained, sifting busily. "You ought to try to reach the greater audience, instead of catering to the cape-and-pimples set. You're getting labeled as a thud-and-blunder hack, and as long as publishers can buy you for a few grand a book, that's all they'll ever see in you."

Damon was stoned enough not to take offense. "Yeah, well, tell that to Helen. She's been trying to peddle a collection of my fantasy stories for the last couple years."

"Are these some of the ones you were writing for *Cavalier* and so on? Christ, I'll have to ask her to show me a copy. You were doing some good stuff back then." "And pumping gas."

"Hey, your time is coming, baby. Just think about what I've said. You wrote a couple of nice horror stories a few years back. Take a shot at a novel."

"If I did, the horror fad would have peaked and passed."

The phone rang. The con chairman wanted them to come down for the official opening ceremonies. Nordgren laid out a couple monster lines to get them primed, and they left to greet their public.

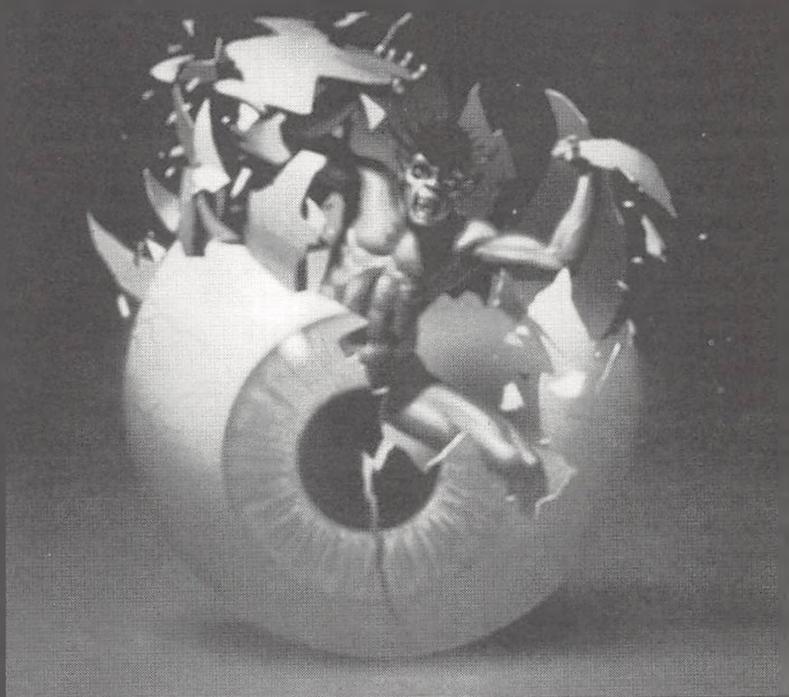
Later that evening Nordgren made friends with an energetic blonde from the local fan group, who promised to show him the sights of New Orleans. When it appeared that most of these sights were for Trevor's eyes only, Damon wandered off with a couple of the local S.C.A. bunch to explore the fleshpots and low dives of the French Quarter.

Soon after, much to Harrington's amazement, Warwick Books bought his short story collection, *Dark Dreams*. They had rejected it a year before, but now Trevor Nordgren had written a twenty page introduction to the book. Helen as much as admitted that Warwick had taken the collection only after some heavy pressure from Nordgren.

As it was, *Dark Dreams* came out uniformly packaged with Warwick's much-heralded Trevor Nordgren reprint series. TREVOR NORDGREN Introduces got Nordgren's name across the cover in letters twice the size of Harrington's name, and only a second glance would indicate that the book was anything other than the latest Trevor

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Nordgren novel. But *Dark Dreams* was the first of Harrington's books ever to go into a second printing, and Damon tore up the several letters of protest he composed.

He was astonished by Nordgren's versatility. The Warwick package included a new, expanded edition of *Time's Wanton*, a reprint of *Acid Test* (with a long, nostalgic introduction), a collection of Nordgren's early short fiction entitled *Electric Dreams* (with accompanying introductions by the author), as well as *Doors of Perception* and *Younger Than Yesterday*—two anthologies of essays and criticism selected from Nordgren's writings for the *Chicago Seed*, *East Village Other*, *Berkeley Barb*, and other underground newspapers of the '60s.

Nordgren had by now gathered a dedicated cult following, in addition to the millions who snapped up his books from the checkout counter racks. Virtually any publication with a vintage Trevor Nordgren item in its pages began to command top collector's prices, Harrington noticed upon browsing through the hucksters' room at the occasional conventions he attended. Trevor Nordgren had become the subject of interviews, articles, and critical essays in everything from mimeographed fanzines to *People* and *Time*. Harrington was amused to find a Trevor Nordgren interview headlining one of the men's magazines that used to reject stories from them both.

Warwick was delighted with sales figures from the Trevor Nordgren Retrospective, as the reprint package was now dignified, and proudly announced the purchase of five additional titles—two new collections of his short fiction and expanded revisions of his other three Essex House novels. In addition (and in conjunction with McGinnis & Parry as part of a complicated contractual buyout) Nordgren was to edit an anthology of his favorite horror stories (*Trevor Nordgren Presents*) and would prepare a nonfiction book discussing his personal opinions and theories of horror as a popular genre (*The View Through The Glass Darkly*).

The Max de Lawrence film of *The Rending* grossed 60 million in its first summer of release, and *The Etching* was still on the paperback top ten lists when *The Dwelling* topped the bestseller charts in the first week. Nordgren's latest concerned a huge Victorian castle in a small New England town; presumably the mansion was haunted, but Nordgren's twist was that the mansion had a life of its own and was itself haunting the community. The idea was good for a quarter of a million words, several million dollars, and a complete tax writeoff of the huge Victorian castle on the Hudson that Nordgren had refurbished and moved into.

Julie Kriegman was fired by the new corporate owners of Summit Books, and the new editor called Krystel Firewind sexist trash and killed the series with #5. Helen Hohenstein broke the news to Harrington somewhat more gently.

"At least Summit paid you."

Damon's only immediate consolation was that the call was on Helen's dime. "Can we sell the series someplace else, or do I wrap sandwiches with the first draft of #6?"

Thank God he hadn't sprung for that word processor Nordgren had urged upon him.

"It doesn't look good. Problem is that every paperback house that wants to already has one or two swords-and-sorcery series going. Do you think you could write high fantasy? That's getting to be big just now. You know—lighten up a little on the violence and bare tits, give your imaginary world more of a fairy-tale atmosphere, maybe ink in a bunch of Celtic myths and that sort of thing.

"I can try it." Harrington imagined Krystel Firewind stripped of sword and armor and a few inches of bustline, gowned in shimmering damask or maybe flowing priestess' robes.

"Great! Keep this to yourself for now, but Columbine has hired Alberta Dawson away from Warwick to be their senior editor and try to rejuvenate their paperback line. She's looking for new material, and she owes me. So get me some chapters and a prospectus soonest. OK?"

"Will do."

"Oh—and Damon. Plan this as a trilogy, could you?"

Harrington read over a few popular works on Celtic mythology and ancient European history to get some names and plot ideas, then started the rewrite of *Krystel Firewind #6*. This he was able to flesh out into a trilogy without much difficulty by basing his overall theme on the struggle of Roman Britain against the Saxon invasions. After her sex-change from Desmond Killstar, it was simple enough to transform Krystel Firewind into a half-elfin Druidic priestess. All that was needed was to change names, plug in his characters, and toss in a little magic.

Alberta Dawson was delighted with *Tallyssa's Quest: Book One of The Fall of the Golden Isles*. She agreed to a contract for the entire trilogy, and confided to Hohenstein that she'd sensed all along that Damon Harrington was a major literary talent. *Tallyssa's Quest* was launched with a major promotional campaign, complete with dump bins and color posters of the book's cover. The cover, a wraparound by some Italian artist, was a rather ethereal thing depicting a billowingly berobed Tallyssa astride her flying unicorn and brandishing her Star of Life amulet to defend her elfin companions from a horde of bestial Kralkings. Harrington would much rather the cover hadn't billed him as "The New Tolkien," but Columbine had paid him his first five-figure advance.

Nordgren phoned him up at 2 in the morning, coked out of his skull, and razed him about it mercilessly. He was just coming out of a messy paternity suit involving a minor he'd shacked up with at some convention, so Damon gave him an hour of his patience. Since *Tallyssa's Quest* had gone into a third printing in its first month, Harrington was not to be baited.

When *The Dwelling* premiered as a television miniseries, Nordgren was a guest on *The Tonight Show*. He was obviously wired and kept breaking up the audience with his off-the-wall responses to the standard where-do-you-get-your-ideas sort of questions. Trevor had taken to smoking a pipe, perhaps to keep his hands

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from shaking, and the designer sunglasses were *de rigueur*. Damon was startled to see how much weight he'd lost. Nordgren managed to get in enough plugs for his new opus, *The Coming*, to have qualified as a paid political announcement. Harrington had skimmed an advance copy of the thing—it appeared to be a 300,000-word rewrite of Lovecraft's "The Outsider"—and had pondered the dangers of mixing cocaine and word processors.

There was a major problem with crowd control at the World Science Fiction Convention in Minneapolis, so that they were forced to abandon their tradition of signing books together. The con committee had had to set a special room aside just for Trevor Nordgren. At one point a news reporter counted over 750 fans standing in line to enter the signing room, many with shopping bags filled with Trevor Nordgren books and magazine appearances. Con committee members tried in vain to enforce the one-person-one-autograph rule, and a near riot broke out when uniformed hotel security guards finally escorted Nordgren to his suite after two and a half hours of signing books. Nordgren placated them by promising to set up a second autographing session the next day.

Something that looked like an ex-linebacker in a three-piece suit greeted Harrington when he knocked on the door of Nordgren's suite. After all the Hammett and Chandler he'd read, Damon felt cheated that he couldn't see the bulge of a roscoe beneath the polyester, but he surmised one was there.

"Damon Harrington to see Mr. Nordgren," he said to the stony face, feeling very much like a character in a Chandler novel. He wished he had a fedora to doff.

"That's OK, John. He's a lodge brother."

Evidently Nordgren was unscarred by last year's lawsuit, since neither of the girls who were cutting lines on the glass-topped table were as old as Trevor if they could have combined both their ages. Nordgren had lately taken to wearing his hair slicked and combed straight back, and he reminded Harrington of a dissolute Helmut Berger posing for a men's fashion spread in *Esquire*.

"After meeting your bodyguard there, I fully expected to find you seated in a wheelchair, wearing a silk dressing robe, and smoking Russian cigarettes through a long amber holder."

"Melody. Heather. Meet my esteemed friend and drinking buddy, Damon Harrington. Damon, join us."

"Weren't you in *Apocalypse Now*?" one of them asked brightly.

"Quite right," Nordgren assured her. "And turn a deaf ear when he promises to get you a role in his next film."

They were almost certain Nordgren was kidding them, but not quite, and kept a speculative watch on Damon.

"The big party isn't until later tonight," Nordgren said, handing him the tooter, "but I felt I must unwind after sustaining terminal writer's cramp from all those autographs. Why not get a good buzz with us now, then rejoin the party after 10?"

"Can't see how you can go through all that."

"All that psychic energy, baby."

"All that money, you mean."

"A little PR never hurt anyone. Speaking of which, Damon—I noticed quite a number of little darlings decked out in flowing bedsheets and pointed ears and carrying about boxed sets of *The Fall of the Golden Isles* in arden quest of your signature. Is rumor true that Colombine has just sprung for a second trilogy in the series?"

"Helen has just about got them to agree to our terms."

"Christ, Damon! We're better than this shit!" Nordgren banged his fist on the table and sent half a gram onto the carpet. One of the girls started to go after it, but Trevor shook his head and muttered that he bought it by the kilo.

"You don't look particularly ready to go back to the good old days of 3¢ a word on publication," Damon suggested.

"And paying the bills with those wonderful \$1000 checks from Bee Line for 60,000 words worth of wet dreams. Did I tell you that a kid came up to me with a copy of *Stud Road* to sign, and he'd paid some huckster \$150 for the thing!"

Damon almost choked on his line. "Remind me to put my copy of *Time's Wanton* in a safe deposit box. Christ, Trevor—you've got enough money from all this to write anything you damn well please."

"But we somehow write what the public wants from us instead. Or do you get off by being followed about by teenage fans in farcical medieval drag with plastic pointy ears and begging to know whether Wyndlunne the Fey is going to be rescued from Grimdooms's Black Tower in *Book Four of The Trilogy of Trilogies*?"

"We both have our fans," Damon said pointedly. "And what dire horrors lie in wait for some small suburban community in your next mega-word chart-buster?"

"Elves," said Nordgren.

The last time that Damon Harrington saw Trevor Nordgren was at the World Fantasy Convention in Miami. Because of crowd problems, Nordgren had stopped going to cons, but a Guest of Honor invitation lured him forth from his castle on the Hudson. He had avoided such public appearances for over a year, and there were lurid rumors of a nervous breakdown, alcoholism, drug addiction, or possibly AIDS.

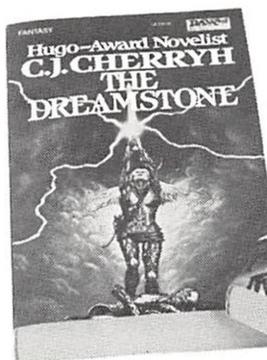
The Changeling, Nordgren's latest and biggest, concerned an evil race of elves who lurked in hidden dens beneath a small suburban community, and who were systematically exchanging elfin babies for the town's human infants. *The Changeling* was dedicated to Damon Harrington—"in remembrance of styrofoam boaters." The novel dominated the bestseller lists for six months, before finally being nudged from first place by *The Return of Tallyssa: Book Six of The Fall of the Golden Isles*.

Harrington squeezed onto an elevator already packed with fans. A chubby teenager in a *Spock Lives!* t-shirt was complaining in an uncouth New York accent: "So I ran up to him when the limo pulled up, and I said to him 'Mr. Nordgren, would you please sign my copy of *The Changeling*,' and he said 'I'd love to, sweetheart, but

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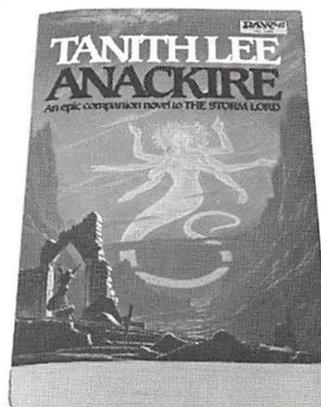
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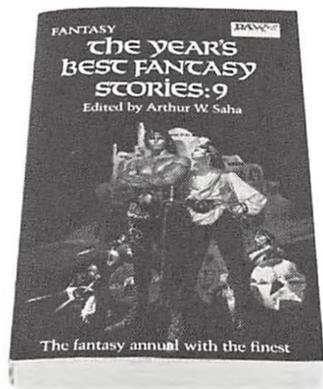
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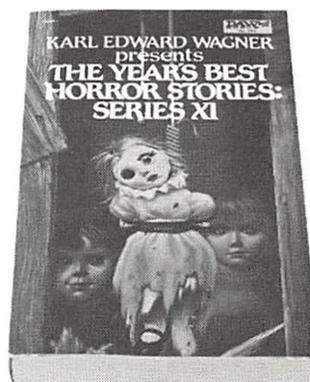
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I don't have the time,' and I said 'But it's just this one book,' and he said 'If I stop for you, there are twenty invisible fans lined up behind you right now with their books,' and I thought 'You concealed turkey and after I've read every one of your books!'"

The elevator door opened on her floor, and she and most of her sympathetic audience got off. As the door closed, Harrington caught an exclamation: "Hey, wasn't that . . .?"

A hotel security guard stopped him as he entered the hallway toward his room, and Harrington had to show him his roomkey and explain that he had the suite opposite Trevor Nordgren's. The guard was scrupulously polite, and explained that earlier fans had been lining up outside Nordgren's door with armloads of books. Damon then understood why the hotel desk had asked him if he minded having a free drink in the lounge until they had prepared his suite after some minor vandalism wrought by the previous guests.

A bell captain appeared with his baggage finally, and then room service stocked his bar. Harrington unpacked a few things, then phoned Nordgren's suite. A not very friendly male voice answered, and refused to do more than take a message. Harrington asked him to tell Mr. Nordgren that Mike Hunt wished to have a drink with him in the suite opposite. Thirty seconds later Nordgren was kicking at his door.

"Gee, Mr. Hunt!" Nordgren gushed in falsetto. "Would you please sign my copy of *The Other Woman*? Huh? Huh? Would you?"

He looked terrible. He was far thinner than when they'd first met, and his skin seemed to hang loose and pallid over his shrunken flesh—reminding Harrington of a snake about to shed its skin. His blue eyes seemed too large for his sallow face, and their familiar arrogance was shadowed by a noticeable haunted look. Harrington thought of some *fin de siècle* poet dying of consumption.

"Jack Daniel's, as usual? Or would you like a Heineken?"

"I'd like just some Perrier water, if you have it there. Cutting down on my vices."

"Sure thing." Damon thought about the rumors. "Hey, brought along some pearl that you won't believe!"

"I'll taste a line of it, then," Nordgren brightened, allowing Damon to bring him his glass of Perrier. "Been a while since I've done any toot. Decided I didn't need a teflon septum."

When Nordgren actually did take only one line, Harrington began to get really concerned. He fiddled with his glass of Jack Daniel's, then managed: "Trevor, I'm only asking as an old friend—but are you all right?"

"Flight down tired me out, that's all. Got to save up my energy for that signing thing tonight."

Damon spent undue attention upon cutting fresh lines. "Yeah, well. I mean, you look a little thin, is all."

Instead of taking offense, Trevor seemed wearily amused. "No, I'm not strung out on coke or smack or uppers or downers or any and all drugs. No, I don't have cancer or some horrid wasting disease. Thank you for your concern."

"Didn't mean to pry." Damon was embarrassed. "Just concerned, is all."

"Thank's, Damon. But I'm off the booze and drugs, and I've had a complete check-up. Frankly, I've been burning the old candle at both ends and in the middle for too long. I'm exhausted body and soul, and I'm planning on treating myself to a long R&R while the royalties roll in."

"Super! Why not plan on spending a couple weeks knocking around down on the coast with me, then? We'll go down to Ensenada."

A flash of Nordgren's bitter humor returned. "Well, I'd sure like to, young feller," he rasped. "But I figger on writin' me one last big book—just one last book. Then I'll take all the money I got put aside, and buy me a little spread down in Texas—hang up my word processor and settle down to raise cattle. Just this one last book is all I need."

The signing party was a complete disaster. The con committee hadn't counted on Nordgren's public and simply put him at a table in the hotel ballroom with the rest of the numerous pros in attendance. The ballroom was totally swamped by Nordgren's fans—many from the Miami area who forced their way into the hotel without registering for the convention. Attempts to control the crowd led to several scuffles; the hotel overreacted and ordered security to clear the ballroom, and numerous fights and acts of vandalism followed before order could be restored. Nordgren was escorted to his suite, where a state of siege existed.

Completely sickened by the disgusting spectacle, Harrington afterward retreated to the Columbine Books party, where he was thoroughly lionized, and where he discovered an astonishing number of fellow writers who had known all along that he had the stuff of genius in him, and who were overjoyed that one of their comrades who had paid his dues at last was rewarded with the overdue recognition and prosperity he so deserved. Harrington decided to get knee-walking, commode-hugging drunk, but he was still able to walk, assisted by the wall, when he finally left the party.

Standing with the other sardines awaiting to be packed into the elevator, Harrington listened to the nasal whine of the acne farm with the shopping bag full of books who had just pushed in front of him: "So all my friends who couldn't afford to make the trip from Des Moines gave me their books to get him to autograph too, and I promised them I would, and then they announced His Highness would sign only three books for each fan, and then they closed the autographing party with me still standing in line and for an hour and a half! I mean, I'm never buying another book by that creep! Nordgren doesn't care shit about his fans!"

"I know!" complained another. "I wrote him an eight-page fan letter, and all I got back was a postcard!"

Harrington managed to get most of the vomit into the shopping bag, and as the crowd cringed away and the elevator door opened, he stumbled inside and made good his escape.

His next memory was of bouncing along the wall of

the corridor that led to his room and hearing sounds of a party at full tilt in Nordgren's suite. Harrington was surprised that Trevor had felt up to throwing a party after the debacle earlier that evening, but old habits must die hard, and Damon thought that a few more drinks were definitely called for after the elevator experience.

The door to Nordgren's suite was open, so Harrington shouldered his way inside. The place was solidly packed with bodies, and Harrington clumsily pushed a route between them, intent on reaching the bar. By the time he was halfway into the party, it struck him that he didn't know any of the people here—somewhat odd in that he and Nordgren generally partied with the same mob of writers and professionals who showed up at the major cons each time. The suite seemed to be packed entirely with fans, and Harrington supposed that they had crashed Nordgren's party, presumably driving the pros into another room or onto the balcony.

Harrington decided the crowd was too intense, the room too claustrophobic. He gave up on reaching the bar and decided to try to find Nordgren and see if he wanted to duck over to his suite for a quick toot and chance to relax. Peering drunkenly about the crowded room, Harrington noticed for the first time that everyone's attention seemed to be focused toward the center. And there he recognized Nordgren.

"Trevor, my man!" Damon's voice sounded unnaturally loud and clear above the unintelligible murmur of the crowd.

He jostled his way toward Nordgren, beginning to get angry that none of the people seemed inclined to move aside despite his mumbled excuse-me's and sorry's. Nordgren might as well have been mired in quicksand, so tightly ringed in by fans as he was, and only Trevor's height allowed Harrington to spot him. Damon thought he looked awful, far worse than earlier in the day.

Nordgren stretched out his hand to Harrington, and Damon's first thought was that he meant to wave or to shake hands, but suddenly it reminded him more of a drowning victim making one last hopeless clutching for help. Shoving through to him, Harrington clasped hands.

Nordgren's handgrip felt very loose, with a scaly dryness that made Damon think of the brittle rustle of over-long fingernails. Harrington shook his hand firmly and tried to draw Nordgren toward him so they could speak together. Nordgren's arm broke off at his shoulder like a stick of dry-rotted wood.

For a long breathless moment Harrington just stood there, gaping stupidly, Nordgren's arm still in his grasp,

the crowd silent, Nordgren's expression as immobile as that of a crucified Christ. Then, ever so slowly, ever so reluctantly, as if there were too little left to drain, a few dark drops of blood began to trickle from the torn stump of Nordgren's shoulder.

The crowd's eyes began to turn upon Harrington, as Nordgren ever so slowly began to collapse like an unstrung marionette.

Harrington awoke the following noon, sprawled fully dressed across a couch in his own suite. He had a poisonous hangover and shuddered at the reflection of his face in the bathroom mirror. He made himself a breakfast of vitamin pills, aspirin, and Valium, then set about cutting a few wake-up lines to get him through the day.

Harrington was not really surprised to learn that Trevor Nordgren had died in his sleep sometime during the night before. Everyone knew it was a drug overdose, but the medical examiner's report ruled heart failure subsequent to extreme physical exhaustion and chronic substance abuse.

Several of the science fiction news magazines asked Harrington to write an obituary for Trevor Nordgren, but Harrington declined. He similarly declined offers from several fan presses to write a biography or critical survey of Nordgren's uncollected writings, and he declined Warwick's suggestion that he complete Nordgren's final unfinished novel. Marten E. Binkley, in his *Reader's Guide to Trevor Nordgren*, attributed this reticence to "Harrington's longtime love-hate relationship with Nordgren that crystalized into professional jealousy with final rejection."

Damon Harrington no longer attends conventions, nor does he autograph books. He does not answer his mail, and he has had his telephone disconnected.

Columbine Books offered Harrington a fat one million advance for a third trilogy in the best-selling *Fall of the Golden Isles* series. When Harrington returned the contract unsigned to Helen Hohenstein, she was able to get Columbine to increase the advance to one and a half million. Harrington threw the contract into the trash.

In his dreams Harrington still sees the faceless mass of hungry eyes, eyes turning from their drained victim and gazing now at him. Drugs seem to help a little, and friends have begun to express concern over his health.

The mystery of Damon Harrington's sudden reclusion has excited the imagination of his public. As a consequence, sales of all of his books are presently at an all-time high.

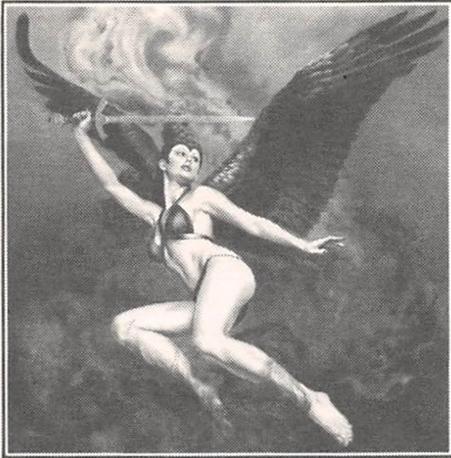
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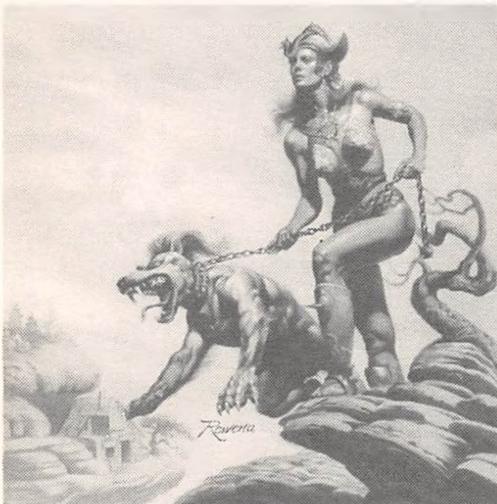
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