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SHANGRI-LA

SPECIAL FICTION ISSUE

NUMBER 11

MARCH 1949

DEDICATION

A complete picture of that microcosm known as the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society would not be complete without taking cognizance of the large percentage of its members who are seriously attempting to make a name for themselves in the field of professional science fiction and fantasy writing. Of the actual full-time members listed at the present time, about 40% are thus spending much of their spare time.

The members of the LASFS have considered that the readers of this, their official club organ, might be interested in some of the work being produced by those members. To that end each of them has been asked to contribute to this Special Fiction Issue of SHANGRI-LA one of the short stories of theirs they consider good - even though no professional editor has as yet concurred with them by purchasing said story.

These stories which follow have each been read and passed upon by several of the members besides the writer thereof, and are considered worthy of inclusion in this collection. We know they are not deathless literature - but we do honestly believe they are interesting reading.

Anyway, they represent one of the more fascinating facets of the LASFS activities. It is curious to watch the expressions on the faces of these various fans each Thursday evening when Agent Ackerman comes on the scene and begins handing out the rejection slips that have been received by him during the preceding week. It is even more interesting to see the great joy that pervades the club room when he has the good fortune to announce a sale by one of the hard-working would-be authors.

In the interest of honesty we are compelled to report that the rejection slips are far, far more numerous than the acceptances. But -- and this is the thing that keeps up the hopes, that spurs the efforts -- an occasional acceptance is recorded; a check is received.

It is undoubtedly the large number of professional authors who come to the club meetings regularly which is responsible for so much of the interest, and no little of the success, which these writing members of the LASFS now have. For these pro writers are, one and all without exception, Good Joes. They give unsparingly of their knowledge and talents in aiding these would-bes; they take valuable time to read and criticize the offerings thrust upon them; they discourse at length and to good avail of the techniques, methods and rules which have made them and other successful authors capable of writing acceptable yarns. They show the pitfalls that beset the unwary amateur; they point out the good work that has been written, and suggest ways of making the poor passages better.

Yes, it is with great gratitude and pride that the writer members of the LASFS give a big hand of appreciation to such stalwarts as A E vanVogt and his charming partner E Mayne Hull; to Ray Bradbury, but a few short years ago merely another LASFS fan-struggling-to-be-an-author; to Ross Rocklynne; to Bryce Walton, and to L Ron Hubbard when in town.

Thanks, you wonderful people! It is to you, with sincere and heartfelt thanks, that this Special Fiction Issue of SHANGRI-LA is humbly and respectfully dedicated.

SHANGRI-LA

SPECIAL FICTION ISSUE * * * MARCH - 1949

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ALL ILLUSTRATIONS by CON PEDERSON
SPEEDOSCOPE WORK by Walt Daugherty

This is Issue NUMBER 11 of SHANGRI-LA, the official publication of the LOS ANGELES SCIENCE FANTASY SOCIETY. All correspondence regarding the issue should be addressed to the editor at 637½ South Bixel Str., Los Angeles 14, Calif. All subscriptions should be sent to 4E Ackerman at 236½ North New Hampshire, Hollywood, California. The price of the magazine is now 15¢ per issue. Our policy is to issue every six weeks.

ATOMIC ERROR

by . . Forrest J Ackerman

He woke up screaming. He felt scalded all over. So this was what radiation burns from an atomic bomb felt like!

He had feared this night since 1945, this night when a robot rocket would jet over the North Pole at supersonic speed. The night that an unknown assassi-nation would masacre America a-bed. That atomicon - flagration would transform the metropolises of the United States into skyscraping mushroom clouds.

He had hoped only that obliteration would come instantaneously and painlessly, that he would be volatized in his dreams, either to awake in the Hereafter, where there theoretically were no atomic bombs, or -- never to awake.

But there was always the unfaceable possibility that he would be caught on the fringe of the fission, then God knew what death would be like. Not a ripping asunder too rapid for the senses to record, but a slow death: a peeling away of the skin in leprous patches; a brain fried in its skull, shriveled and convulsed like worms writhing in a fiery skillet; eyes, liquefying and oozing out of their sockets like sap from a tree.

The man knew himself. Not a coward, but a cerebrotonic -- supersensitive to the thought of pain. A thousand times he had suffered premature agony, envisioning his life ending in an atomic cauldron of radiation, his body burning in waves of invisible fire. He couldn't take a death like that. That was why he protected himself with an automatic. He always slept with it under his pillow. He reached for it now.

Pray God the radiation had not warped it, melted the barrel or exploded the cartridges!

In the darkness he groped. He couldn't see. He couldn't hear a sound. He was conscious only of the prickling sensation all over his body.

His fingers found the gun. It was hot. In terror mixed with relief he jerked it to his temple, and in a moment it was hotter.

"Now what could have made him do that?" the fire chief puzzled. "He wasn't in any danger. The steam didn't even really scald him to amount to anything. He looked a little dazed -- anybody'd be shocked, sure, to have a boiler blow up underneath 'em in the middle of the night -- but I called to him, 'You're okay, Mister', just a second before he fished under his pillow for the pistol."

"Poor Mr. Vance." The hotel manager shook his head regretfully. "He was born deaf, and on top of that lost his sight about two years ago."

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JUST A MINUTE, by the Secretary

February 3rd, 1949; 480th Consecutive Meeting:

Perhaps it was merely coincidence that the latest issue of this magazine should have been distributed upon the thirteenth anniversary of the Los Angeles Schience Fantasy Society, but if so, it was an appropriate one. Perhaps, slso, nostalgia prompted the program that followed. At any rate, memory of the past and hope for the future were strong.

Forrest J Ackerman, Walt Daugherty and Russ Hodgkins took care of the memory department bu recalling the first few sessions of the infant LASFL, as it was then called, it having started out as a chapter of the WONDER-sponsored League. 4E described the first meeting and Russ talked of the actions, attitudes, etc., of some of the-then-members; Walt told some hunorous incidents that occurred.

February 10; 481st Consecutive Meeting:

Walt Daugherty gave a review of the Goddard Exhibit held at the Southwest Museum. He described films shown, and promised he would try to obtain them for showing at the Club. He mentioned that Arthur Louis Joquel II, a former member, gave science-fiction some strong plugs in his talk.

Rick Strauss gave a highly-interesting, impromptu lecture on "The Nature of Time," whoch caused considerable discussion.

February 17th; 482nd Consecutive Meeting:

Our speaker was E Everett Evans, who spoke on "Legends Connected with The Wandering Jew", giving backgrounds of the books by Wallace, Croly, Sue, Viereck & Eldredge. He analyzed the historico-symbolic meanings of the legend.

February 24th; 483rd Consecutive Meeting:

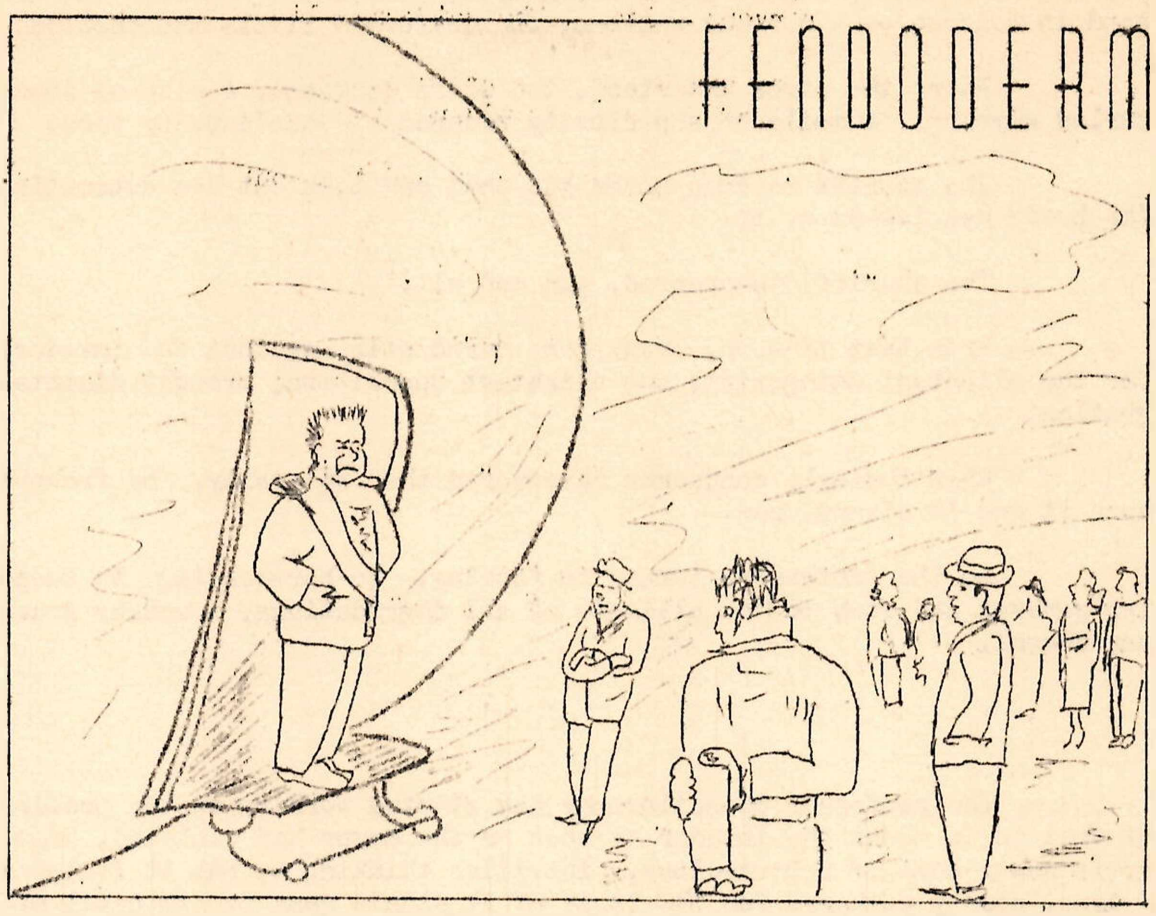
Walt Daugherty informed us he was moving his printing and mimeoing equipment from the rooms, but that it would not affect the club's position there. Another man will have desk space there daytimes, but it will not interfere. Walt also read a card from August Derleth congratulating us on #10 SHANGRI-LA.

The big event of the evening was a debate concerning the relative merits of W Olaf Stapledon's "Odd John". Pro were Alan U(niversity) Hershey and Eph Konigsberg; Con were the "up*and*Adams" -- Freddie Hershey and Jean Cox, who thought Weinbaum's "The New Adam" a better book.

March 3rd; 484th Consecutive Meeting:

Rick Strauss called for, and Louise Leipiar received a unanimous vote of thanks for her splendid work on the Fanquet.

Everett, himself, had one objection: He reminded us that the Fanquet was supposed to be free as far as he was concerned, yet he had had to put out two cents for a new razor blade to make himself pretty -- and he wanted a refund! He got it, too, although there were a couple of counter-objections. Dick Timmer protested that the shave had lasted two days, and, therefore, the club should only have to pay him half a cent, but that was ruled out; general consensus of opinion, however, was that next time he needn't try to be so pretty. Two fine science films played.



by

Kenneth H. Bonnell

He was a professor of philosophy at a small University when the spaceships came. He went out to the outskirts of town with the rest of the population, to watch them land. Friends from the University were there, the instructor in government, the biologist Murphy, and the mathematics professor Jacobs. The government instructor stood apart from the biologist, the mathematician, and the philosopher, who talked quietly about the event.

Across the meadow beyond the blunt shining noses were the mayor and the sheriff. They had come together out of the crowd and now walked toward what seemed to be the largest of the spaceships. A door appeared in the hull, near the nose, halfway down the side. In it stood a man, short, beefy, grotesque in a brilliant uniform -- a world dictator for years to come.

A ladder slid to the ground.

The ugly man descended, followed by several other men in uni-

form. Their carriage was erect, in a most Prussian-like manner. He stopped in front of the mayor. The tall, graying man smiled and held out his hand in welcome -- a nervous welcome. The uniformed little man scowled.

Where the mayor had stood, the grass darkened. A wisp of smoke curled skyward. A smile of superiority widened the man's beefy face.

The sheriff reached under his coat and took out his automatic. The beefy man looked at it.

The sheriff disappeared, gun and all.

From that time on, very few dared stir against the invader, for the slightest antagonism, the slightest opposition, brought disintegration.

When the ugly conqueror discovered the University, he frowned upon it and it disappeared.

So the professors turned to farming, to bar-tending, to keeping gardens, and even to the ultimate of all degradations, teaching grammar shcool.

The professor of philosophy had started working on the problem of what to do about the invader as soon as the mayor had vanished. Mostly it was a sort of subconscious, intuitive thinking -- but it followed a lone, slowly perhaps, for the logic of it didn't come to him until after Jerry, the soda clerk at the drugstore, disappeared when he refused to mix the conqueror a malt. That was eight months after the landing.

Four months later, the entire structure of the situation formed in his mind. The philosopher didn't like children but, he found, they were the only ones who would fit into his plan. So he began teaching -- kindergarten the first year, first grade the next, and so on. So the same children would be under his tutelage as they grew.

Years passed. The usual underground organizations sprang into existence; the usual quislings turned their members over to disintegration and did other of the invader's dirty work. The instructor in government quislinged, became mayor under the invader.

Murphy, the biologist, lost sight of biology for mysticism. Freed from his duties at the University he sought "Life", the ultimate quality of living matter. And was lost to the world.

The mathematics professor, Jacobs, headed his own resistance movement -- spreading his own doctrines of mathematical evaluation --and proved the biggest help in the philosopher's work. Those two coöperated in part, for the philosopher's formulations needed mathematical correlation. And the philosopher's method was part mathematical, too.

It took twelve years to get ready. Twelve long years of careful training, twelve long years of mental hide-and-seek -- and at last

the time had come. It was on the thirteenth anniversary of the landing that the invaders were destroyed.

The spaceships still rested in the meadow where they had landed. They still glinted newly in the sun and showed the meticulousness of their owners, who had not, as many invaders before them, moved into town quarters.

The crowd milled about the ships. Among them were the youth. Each was known personally to the philosopher. Each was trained thoroly. There was a tenseness about these; yet something there was about them that made their elders relax and feel at ease, despite the significance of the situation.

The chief of the invaders appeared in his brilliant uniform. He stood in the door of one of the ships and looked down on the people. He seemed surprised, irritated.

His expression said that he felt something was wrong. He seemed nervous about the prospect of using the easy method of turning them all into nothing; it was the whole of the town's population there. He seemed to sense that even one death would not quell any unrest.

So he went down to investigate.

His ever-present men followed, with their still Prussian-like manner.

The crowd stilled; its members fell back and presented a single face for the enemy to see. It waited quietly while its leader detached himself from the edge. Six steps forward ...

Moved the philosophy professor.

"We would like you and your bunch to leave," Simply, without emotion.

He vanished.

And while the wisp of smoke curled upward ...

It was joined by the dust of the invader, and his ships, and all that they had brought.

And as it was told by armchair scientists later, it was an inversion of Pavlov's "conditioned reflex".

Matter was conditioned to disappear at youth's sight of a wisp of smoke, and the professor's absence.

Those who could do this soon forgot -- in hypnosis.

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MORE MINUTES

March 10th; 485th Consecutive Meeting:

Large attendance this meeting. Jean Cox motioned that the LASFS Writers' Award Fanquet be reinstated for 1949, with the added stipulation, that the Award be self-perpetuating until decided otherwise. Carried.

Agentman reported that the English "New Worlds" was on its way from England; that a new Anthology was due soon, in which the selected authors would pick their own favorites. AEVanVogt and Ray Bradbury are among those represented. Acky also reported a sale to ASTOUNDING by Kris Neville, quondam member.

Konigsberg gave a review and analysis of Jules Verne's "Mysterious Island", praising it highly. He pointed out that most STF stories of today do not contain as much basic knowledge of science as this one.

Alan Hershey gave a short defense of A Merritt's "Seven Foot - prints to Satan". Walt Daugherty told how he had interested Warner's in the book as a vehicle for Sydney Greenstreet as "Satan". How a scenario outline was made, initial costs worked out, and the matter brought up at a producers' meeting, only to be turned down because the sets would cost far too much if they were done as they should be. So it was shelved. He told of other such incidents, including work done by Leigh Brackett when she was under contract to RKO. That's why, Walt concluded, we don't get more Fantasy or STF films -- the cost is apt to be prohibitive.

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IT'S COMING! IT SURE IS!

As you've noted, there's been a switch. The issue originally scheduled to come out this month will be published May first. It will contain some surprises, we hope.

As announced in the last issue of SHANGRI-LA, this forthcoming issue will feature a random sampling of articles, art work, poems, yes and maybe even stories, which have appeared in past issues of fan magazines published by members of the LASFS.

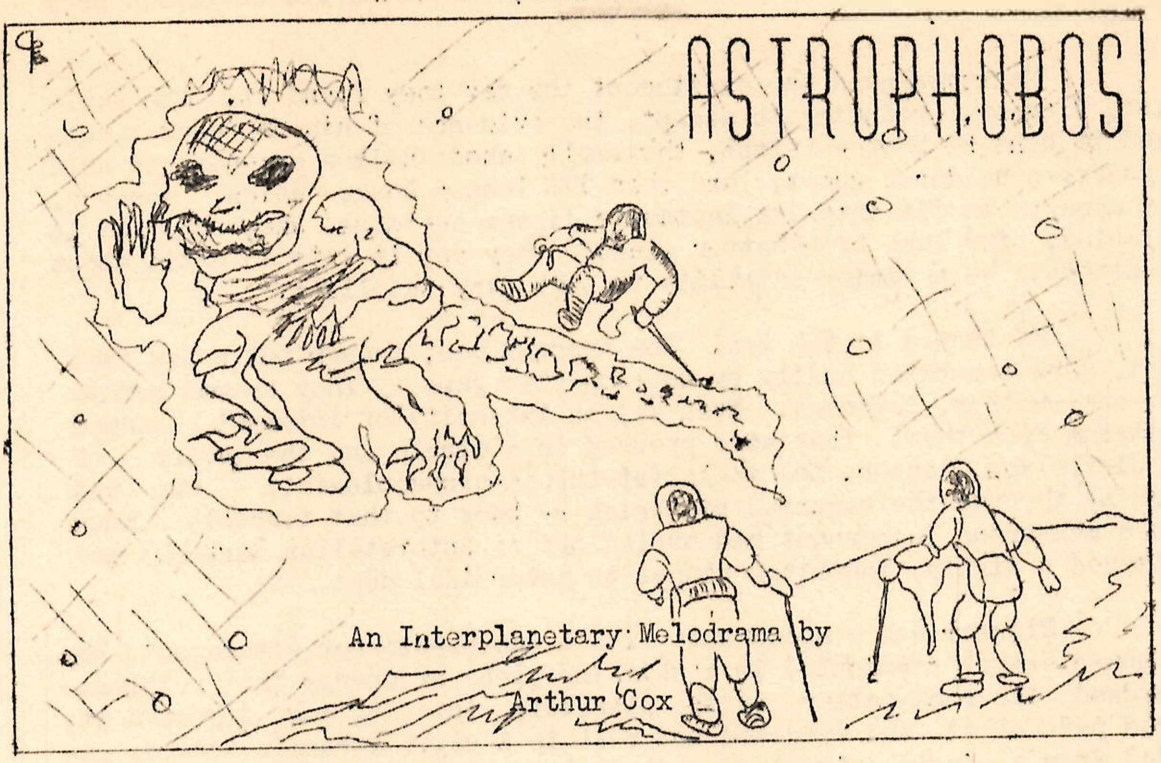
The cover and one inside page will consist of a montage of some of the fine art work which has been published, including, no less, a famous line drawing by Ray Bradbury. You will be treated to a letter written by one of our leading fans when he was 15 years old -- a long time ago!

Anything else? Yes! Professor Fassbinder will discourse on some aspects of...but read and see what. A scientific article by Prof, Oxnard C B Himmel. Remember some of the old issues of "Sweetness and Light"? Ha! It's title is (was) ((will be?)) inaccurate. A story inspired by "World of Null-A", which has to be read to be bedeviled.

Above all, it will have an editorial page unique in its design. It will, of course, give credit where credit is due -- and hold your hats!! Volume number and issue, maybe even the actual page numbers.

You've been warned! No free copies! Send your filthy lucre in, in advance. All 15¢ of it. We'll chance the germs. You'll be delighted, or we'll refund your ..... WHAT ARE WE SAYING!!

Anyway, GET IT! YOU'LL BE SORRY IF YOU DON'T. WE'RE TELLING YOU!!



EXCERPT FROM THE DIARY OF CAPTAIN KENNETH SCHILLER OF THE S. S. Molecule---

1/22/1973

"We discovered today that we are living in the shadow of a mighty race -- a race that perished more than fifty-thousand years ago in a cosmic catastrophe...

"Clouser, only two days after his sensational discovery of the 'monster', has excavated from this bit of celestial strata a broken, incredibly-ancient, but unmistakable wheel...

"The oddness of our unnatural environment has been curiously accented by our discovery that Commissioner Leib is an astrologer and a representative of a powerful cult, the Latter Day Mystics..."

Schiller thought: What a strange tableau! Seven canned men standing on a flying plateau. Seven mechanical monsters on a cosmic pebble.

He looked about him. The metallic rock of the asteroid seemed to reflect brokenly the millions of hard-bright stars.

He caught a flash of whiteness and turned. Over the horizon of that microscopic world there rose a white spectre of fury; a monster crouched against the very bosom of space, itself. Jaws agape, claws extended, it lifted with majestic malice above them, ready to spring, the glare of the distance sun forming a halo about its head. Minutes later it paused for one unreal instant above the 'western' horizon, body tense with indecision, and then sank from sight in reluctant departure. Schil-

ler knew it would be back in half an hour, tracking its invisible prey through the void.

He remembered the excitement the day they found it. The geologist, Clouser, refusing to accept the evidence of his own senses, exposed it bone by bone -- first, the skull whose hollow eye-sockets held a mystery none dared guess, and then 778 lesser bones which, somehow, they managed to fit into its fantastic jigsaw skeleton. When they had it assembled, for lack of a better place, they set it into an orbit about the asteroid -- a tinier satellite to this tiny satellite.

He turned to the men. The armored men, though but a few feet apart, were separated bodily by unbridgeable gaps. They seemed remote from one another, detached. Even so, an intensity of interest seemed to stream from them. They were grouped in a circle and the center of the circle was Clouser. the geologist-turned-archaeologist, who was piercing through the vacuumed centuries -- back to that terrible hour when a monstrous juggernaut had hurled out of interstellar darkness and shattered a mighty, inhabited planet to asteroidal dust.

Clouser was a space-suit with a vacuum-cleaner attachment. The "vacuum-cleaner" terminated in a whirling globe of energy that ruthlessly sucked the rock-matter of the planetoid into its maw, digested it, stored part of it and excreted the rest in a swift stream voidward; expelled from a single, circular orifice it erupted away, closely packed, in the form of a metallic bar stretching into infinity.

Schiller's anal-metaphorizing was disrupted by the familiar, overly-loud voice which rang in his earphones:

"Captain, I demand that you listen to me."

Schiller turned. One of the spacesuits stood facing him. The interior of the glass-fronted helmet was illuminated, exposing a gross, florid face within. It was, he thought, like staring at a piece of raw red meat in a butcher's display counter.

"I have never refused, Leib," he answered shortly.

"Privately," amended the Commissioner.

Schiller cursed Leib's flare for dramatizing himself. Didn't the man realize that he was creating even greater tension between himself and the others? But he adjusted the toggle to a tight-band.

"Captain," began Leib, "I've studied the records left behind by the people who once inhabited this world. It is apparent, even to Clouser, that they divided their year into twelve months."

"Not at all unlikely. We've found engravings showing them with six fingers on each hand. Their division of months reflects that."

Leib made a wry face. "Nonsense, Captain! Why don't we divide our year into ten months -- we have five fingers on each hand. But let's not argue. I mentioned it only to emphasize some remarks I'm going to make.

"Manson has determined the time the catastrophe happened from the position of the planets at that time. I have taken the trouble to check the positions of the problems they derived against the positions of the planets at the present time as seen from this point of reference. Listen, they are exactly the same now as they were two days before the catastrophe -- point for point!

"Surely, you cannot escape the significance of that!"

Leib paused, looking at Schiller intently. "You're Captain of this expedition," he said softly, "your fate is inextricably woven in within its." He paused again, then continued. "I understand that you were born under the sign of Mars. Mars is now in opposition to this frame-of-reference... And the sunspots are at maximum. I'm sorry, Captain, but the conclusion is inevitable:

"In two days you will die."

EXCERPT FROM DIARY---

1/22/1973

"It is imperative that this expedition be a success, Not only for the personal recognition it will bring the others and myself, but because the fate of future expeditions will be determined by this one...

"We live in a dying culture. Only the discovery and exploitation of new lands can revitalize that culture, and that depends upon the development of interplanetary and interstellar travel...

"But the Science Bureau of the Anglo-American Union is unaware of that -- their sole concern is with how public funds are being spent. Their evaluation of that will rest upon Commissioner Leib's report..."

Schiller stood amazed at the sharp pulse of anger inside him. He shouldn't let this hysterical infant...

At the base of the anger he found fear -- a sharp, persistent fear that vibrated in the pit of his stomach, quiveringly. His amazement grew.

He looked up at the stars. He and the asteroid were perched precariously upon the rim of the void -- and he felt it teeter beneath him...Space was a vast gulf of nothingness into which the universe might slip.

The excitement of the past few weeks had placed a great strain on his men and himself, especially on him for he had their troubles as well as his own. The world was strangely unstable, just as this little asteroid was gravitically unstable, and it held little security -- any threat to that security -- even Leib's babblings -- were felt as serious threats.

But the explanation wasn't enough -- there was something lacking.

He was startled by his lack of insight into his own reactions. He was appointed to this position of Captain, not only for any executive abilities he might possess, but because he was an experienced psychiatrist. Psycho-therapeuticians were greatly needed in this strained milieu. Human warmth seemed impossible in space. It was either stifled in the cramped quarters of a space-ship or sucked away into the vacuum of space. It was an environment ideal for scientific detachment, but hardly conducive for healthful emotional relationships.

He had noticed before his fear-feelings on leaving the space-ship, but he had ascribed them to simple agoraphobia, a dislike of "wide open spaces". But there seemed to be something else...

He turned his attention back to Leib. He had failed to realize the extent of the big man's hostility toward him. The Commissioner's prognostications represented a rationalization of unconscious death-wishes he had projected upon Schiller.

Schiller's earphones, imitating Leib's voice, said:

"I sense that, though impressed, you have chosen to disregard what I've said. As a student of human nature, I'm aware that it's quite natural to reject unpleasant ideas." He smiled a clever smile. "At this moment you're concccting hundreds of arguments as to why astrology is a mere superstition, but it's useless."

His voice and manner changed slightly, as he slipped into what seemed to be a prepared speech.

"Astrology is on a much firmer basis today than ever before. It is a science, a science of radiations. It is Einsteinian in character, since Astrology is relative. The world has a structure in which everything is related, even the planets to man. The world is dynamic and those relations change. Since the courses of the planets are predictable, is it not logical to predict what we will do by what the stars do?"

Leib's voice was quieter now. "Captain Schiller, I know you for a courageous man, but you don't have to die. A disaster does not have to take place -- providing you leave this frame-of-reference. That is the important thing."

"I see," said Schiller, the knife-edge of comprehension in his voice, "you're suggesting we go home. Sorry, nothing doing!"

Leib lost his temper. "What kind of fool are you, Schiller? Are you going to let dogma imperil your own life? I have some authority here, and I say, 'return home, and return home at once'!"

Schiller swallowed his anger. "Wrong, Leib, you have no authority here -- you are merely an observer." A pause -- and, "I beg your pardon, but you do have some authority. As a member of the crew, you're allowed to vote on such matters. I will put the matter to a vote of all the men."

"No!" protested Leib, but his voice was snapped off, as Schiller switched to an open circuit.

EXCERPT FROM DIARY---

1/22/1973

"I find it impossible to believe that Leib, unlike other human beings, is without positive aspects to his personality -- the negative characteristics have become magnified by tension until they are overshadowing...

"I am deeply afraid that he will turn in a deliberately negative report on the expedition, out of hostility towards us..."

Schiller explained in full. There was silence, then Manson, the astronomer, asked:

"Tell us, Commissioner, just how did you determine that the positions of the stars at present and at that time were the same?"

"With--," began Leib, and stopped. Then: "Damn you, Manson, how many times must I tell you that I didn't break your telescope?"

Everyone stood silent. They knew Leib for a liar. He had been practically caught meddling with Manson's expensive, electronic telescope aboard the Molecule -- making "astrological investigations" -- and no one else would be so petty as to deny damaging the instrument once they had done so, except Leib. Its loss had reduced Manson to using a small, standard-space-equipment 'scope.

"I didn't ask you what kind of instrument you used," said Manson, the strain of anger in his voice. "I want to know how you checked your present findings with mine."

"As protector of the use of public funds," answered Leib curtly, "I have full right to enter the chart room and inspect any charts there!"

"Listen, Commissioner," said Schiller, "can't you understand that you're not being accused of anything. Manson merely wants to know how you checked your figures."

"It should be obvious to a moron. I made certain observations myself, and compared them with Manson's charts."

Manson laughed. "And the planets on the charts were unlabeled. No wonder you were able to pull such a stupid boner! Hasn't it occurred to you, Leib, that one of the planets in the sky just before the catastrophe must have been the planet which collided with this one? And, now that it's gone the charts couldn't be identical?"

Through the glass-front, Leib's face showed momentary astonishment. He turned in amazement and pointed to a bright spot above the "horizon". "What do you think that is -- Jupiter?"

"Probably a star," said Manson, and Schiller was startled by the lack of conviction in the fellow's voice. Manson adjusted his field 'scope and, holding it close to his visor-plate, inspected the "star"

through it. Adjusting it again, he slowly paced thirty feet away. Slowly, because as he moved he had to grapple and ungrapple the surface of the asteroid with his space-rod, a marvelous device used for travelling over the surface of the space-ship. Attached to a space-suit by a long and adjustable cord, its lower end fused and blended with the rock surface through molecular means.

Manson stopped and looked through the 'scope at the spot. He paced slowly back again and again 'scope and visor contacted. "G'Lord!" he said, and paced back again.

"What's wrong, Manson?" demanded Schiller.

"That body ..." Manson stopped and looked again. When he next spoke his voice was nearly hysterical. "Each time I check its position it's much closer. It's another asteroid ... It's moving fast .. in this direction ..."

He stopped, adjusted again, checked. Suddenly, he laughed: "See, you were wrong, Leib! It's not in two days. ... It's a matter of minutes ..." Manson's space-suit vibrated as with a crumbling body, but it remained standing.

"A collision..." said Leib, and there was something of triumph in his voice.

"Shut up!" said one of the men. "It's a half-hour's journey back to the other side of the asteroid where the ship is, with these damn 'climbing-sticks'. You're going to die, because we'll never make it."

EXCERPT FROM DIARY---

1/23/1973

> "It was with Clouser's words that I knew my greatest moment of fear and realization. In that terrible moment, an insight revealed to me that nature of my fear at Leib's previous death-warning. I had never realized that astrophobia was a part of my nature...
>
> "It represents a reaction against my early theological training, a rebellion against the concept of the 'guardian, ever-watching stars' implanted in me by my father, and a revolt against him...
>
> "I can see, now, how my fight to 'conquer' the world expressed itself by becoming interested in space-travel, in becoming captain of this ship..."

Leib tried to say something, but his voice rattled incomprehensibly.

Manson awakened, moaning. To Schiller, then, there appeared a moment of blurred action as in a dream: Leib screamed, "Shut up!", and struck at the young astronomer with his space-rod. The end of the pole struck the man's visor plate and fused there. The heat generated by the

fusion warped, melted the plastic. The air rushed out of the helmet and expanded, with its own heat, into invisibility. There was a sudden, red, thin film of blood from the headpiece, and then an expanding cloud that thinned into nothingness. The space-suit sagged, but did not fall.

As if horrified at his own action, Leib stepped back. His negligible weight carried him full into the blast of Clouser's excavator, which was still working. The thick, hard stream of rock-matter smashed a hole straight through him as a nail would through rotten wood. He was shot into space by the force of the blow and disappeared in the high-depths.

All in twenty seconds.

Dazed, Schiller noticed the approaching asteroid; it was now discernible as a disc -- which meant that, for a body its size, it was terribly close.

But in that moment came an inspiration born of desperation. For his eye had been caught by a flash of whiteness. Over the horizon of the microscopic world there had risen a white spectacle of fury; even now it was pausing above the "western" horizon as if undecided. But in Schiller there was no time for indecision -- he jumped. With a flick of his finger he had released his climbing-rod from the surface and fled upward at an oblique angle to embrace the dragon. He struck the jig-saw puzzle. It struggled in his grasp, half-turned, but maintained a semblance of its old orbit.

He clung. Looking down he saw the asteroid moving beneath him like a many-faceted jewel turning on an axis. He shouted orders into the earphones of his men: "Jump! Jump straight up!"

A confused moment and then they, obeying their dragon-riding lord in the sky, flung themselves into the bottomless abyss.

The Molecule, a globule of silver and chromium clinging to a rock, came into view. He pushed mightily against the skeleton, propelling himself toward the ship. With the motion, his arm lashed out and, like a spear-throwing primitive, shot his space-rod at the asteroid. It struck, fused, held.

A moment later he was aboard the Molecule. Another and he had spotted and was ready to pick up the sentient meteorites that were his men. Together, they watched the two asteroids re-enact an age-old tragedy.

EXCERPT FROM DIARY---

1/23/1973

"Despite our losses, we can still win our fight for man's wings. We discovered an hour ago that our fossil, freed from the weak gravity of the extinct asteroid, is falling sunward as if pursuing us. We will take it in tow. This 'captive', alone, should be enough to inflame the imagination of the world..."

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TRIPOLICON

WHAT?: Dinner in honor of E Everett Evans, fan-pro-author
WHY? : For his having been top non-pro LASFS writer for the year 1948, having sold five stories;
WHEN?: 8:00 o'clock, Saturday p.m., February 26th, 1949;
WHERE: The Unique Restaurant, Washington and Figueroa Sts in Los Angeles, California.

Held in the small but beautiful dining room of the UNIQUE, this event was marked by the many notables present, and the delicious chicken dinner which was served.

There were thirty-nine fans and authors attending, including practically the entire LASFS; all but one of the OUTLANDERS SOCIETY, and such well-known fan-pro personages as Dr Alfred DeCastro, A E VanVogt, E Mayne Hull, Ray Bradbury, Bryce Walton, Clare Winger Harris, Hal Braham.

Louise Leipiar was Official Welcomer, and Walt Daugherty acted as Master of Ceremonies. After the dinner was finished, Walt began the symbolic-festivities by introducing everyone in the room, and telling a little about them.

Several people, as they were introduced, arose and said a few words. One of these was Dr DeCastro, a member of the Lovecraft circle of intimates, who reminisced about his early days with Lovecraft, Mark Twain and Ambrose Bierce. Eph Konigsberg read a poem, written by L Ron Hubbard, and dedicated to Evans.

Ray Bradbury, in introducing the Guest of Honor, said in part: "There have been two completely happy days in my life. The first, that Summer day in 1941 when I sold my first story to "Super Science"; the second was the day I learned that E Everett Evans had sold his first story."

Everett's talk was an expert blending of humor, nostalgia and inspirational message. He began it by extracting from his brief-case a thick pile of manuscript papers. "I suspected I might be called upon to say something," he remarked, "so I made a few notes." Seeing the consternation on the faces of his audience, he removed the bottom half-inch from the pile, saying, "I'll make it easier for you." For some reason though, he forgot his notes once he began speaking. He told of his earliest experiences in writing, of his efforts through the years, of the help he had received from the pros here in LA, and finally of his first triumphs, for which he gave full credit to those who had helped him.

Next to speak was Forrest J Ackerman, who read selections from letters (?(congratulating Everett on winning the award. One mentioned the "early days when we were boys together and you told us fantastic yarns of voices that could speak across the ocean, and machines able to fly through the air". "It was signed (?) by Al Jolson and Jules Verne. Another was a letter from Lloyds of London, offering to insure Evans' writing future for $50,000.00. Another was from Henry Kuttner, in form of an affidavit, swearing he was not a pseudonym for E Everett Evans.

AEVanVogt gave a short inspirational talk entitled "The Pistol Shot", giving some fine pointers on writing techniques, and concluded by hoping that every person so inclined would be in the running with three or more stories sold this coming year.

Daugherty presented the Award. "Everett," he said, if you were a novelist, you'd get a Pulitzer Prize; if you were a scientist, the Nobel Award; an actor, the Oscar. But all we can give you as a token of our sincere esteem is this booklet, in which all present have written their sentiments on this occasion, and their congratulations to you." It was, all in all, a truly memorable evening. . . . . By Secretary

The cairn and altar were broken and tumbled.

Helga brought her horse to a stop and she looked down upon the stones and strewn symbols.

Someone had come before her, found the sacrificial cairn, and knocked it apart. She sat stiffly upon her horse and did not move. Beyond the screen of a high, wind-blown tree, stood another horse, and upon the back of the horse, a dark man. The horse walked slowly forward and the man was her father.

"Get you home," he said.

"I won't," she cried. "You've ruined it."

"A daughter of mine," he said coldly. "Worshipping on a hill top. Making sacrifices to .....". He did not go on. "I thought it was only talk. A long time you've talked, but little attention I paid. It's your Uncle, of course. Him and his talk of Odin and Thor and all that idiot's froth about The Old Ones!"

"He doesn't know about this," said Helga. "I built it, years ago by myself, alone. It took me a month. And I'll build it again when I have the chance."

He reined his horse closer to hers, reached out and slapped her once, twice, vicious blows upon her mouth. Tears rolled from her eyes, but no sound from her throat. Yet she could so easily have stopped him. For she was not small, this eighteen-year-old Helga, but big. Big bones, big muscled to top of her wheat-yellow braids five feet eleven inches above the ground.

"Come on!" Papa commanded, and wheeled his horse.

They rode down into the twilight valley, not speaking all of the way. The lights of the farm came up to meet them.

Night was outside the windows, inside was laughing and dinner smells and moving of hands among warm foods, shining silver and dishes.

"Mama," said Papa, gesturing with his knife. "Did you know that your daughter wants to be a Valkyr, eh? Sure." He winked enormously. "That's what this Helga wants. To be a Valkyr. Life's not too happy here with us, I suppose. Or we're not good enough for her. Did you know that, Mama? And you other children, there?" He scowled at them. "You know, she built a cairn, a real cairn and blut-sacrifice altar, and she worshipped at it. I found them, yes I did, and I tore them down!"

Helga sat, her head down, her face flaming. She glanced up at a great giant of a man, face reddened with the winds and the rains of a thousand sea-gales -- her Uncle Swan, who sat across the table from her, food in his mouth, not chewing. He looked at her and nodded. He swallowed hastily, and said, "Girls, they like to dream, Harald."

"Shut up!" cried Papa, losing his mock gaiety, and the laughter of Helga's brothers and sisters ceased abruptly. "You, you sniveling Uncle," shouted Papa, glaring at Uncle Swan. "You have no authority in my house! It was you who taught her all this! You!" He looked now at his wife. "Your brother, your idiot brother, with his tales of the Old Days. I don't want him eating at my table again!"

"Now, now," said Mama.

"Get out!" declared Papa, standing up, upsetting his chair in his anger. "I was going to wait and send you off next month, but no, I'm sick to my stomach, I can't eat with your face at my table again!"

Uncle Swan arose with dignity.

"Silly idiot," yelled Papa. "You and your stories. Well, go sleep in the fields, tell your stories to the Moon. But let me not see you near my Helga again!"

Uncle Swan nodded with dignity. On his way from the room he patted Helga on the shoulder. Everyone was frozen at the table. No one moved a fork.

The door closed. Uncle Swan was gone.

Putting her head down on the table, Helga cried silently.

Helga lay in her bed in the moonlight and the sobbing passed away.

Oh, yes, she thought, to be away from here. To go up into the sky. To ride my horse like a white wave coming in on a long shore. To

hear the voices, to be with them up there, with Thor and Odin and Freya and all the other magic ones.

Especially with the Valkyrs, those wonderful Maids of Battle.

Each of theose Maids Helga knew as a loved friend whom she so longed to join in Sisterhood. From early childhood she'd known them. Clearly, so clearly she could see them on their great white horses. See their wheat-yellow hair, so like her own, streaming out from beneath golden helmets. The bright heaven-light glinting from their blood-red corslets, from tips of glittering spears, from facing and edges of polished shields.

There was bright Svanhvit the Golden, most beautiful of those most beautiful girls. And Olrun and Alvit the graceful ones, whose dancing was as enjoyed in the mead-hall as was the never-emptiness of their pitchers of the divine mead.

Helga could see clearly that striding Skaugul the Bold, most intrepid of this fearless band, always first on the fields of battle to gather souls of the warrior dead.

Clear, clear were Gunnr and Hildr, fleet of foot, whose racing was the despair yet delight of warriors who sought to best them, but never could.

Calm-faced Gaundul the Wise was there -- Gaundul, favorite pupil of Baldur and Mimir. So, too, was Geir-skaugal, leader of the band when a leader was needed.

Remembering absent Brynhyld, doomed to ages of mortality for loving Siegfried,Helga had never let herself become too fond of any man.

Aye, well she knew the Valkyries, daughters of mortal kings, who had found favor in Wuotan's sight. Well, she, too, had blood of ancient kings in her veins, Helga remembered proudly. Surely this gave her right to believe and hope.

So, for years she'd prayed daily in her room, and had sacrificed when possible at the cairn and altar she'd builded on high Skald Hill.

But now cairn and altar were wrecked and torn by that obstinate Papa she so wanted to love, but could not.

Memory chided her for unsuspectingly aiding in the opposition she'd known. Such as that day when Teacher had told the children to write a theme on what they most wanted from life. Helga had laid her heart bare for them to laugh at. Aiee! but she'd been foolish, and had only herself to blame that she'd been "crazy Helga" to them since. Even Teacher had scolded her and, worse, told Papa.

He'd whipped her terribly that night, while Mama cried in vain. Helga groaned in memory of that awful beating, so severe blood was drawn and a doctor needed to treat her bruises and lacerations.

Well, that was past. Nor had it weaned Helga from her own so-stubbornly-held beliefs. Rather was she more confirmed in them. Yet

learned to retreat into the silence of her own mind, which was peopled with the Great Ones of days long agone.

How often had she walked with Baldur in the green-drenched beech-woods, listening reverently as he murmured muted measures of long-forgotten runes.

"Hist!"

She turned on her bed.

She waited.

Again "Hist!" A tap at the window.

Outside, in the night, perched on a tree limb to which he had climbed with much effort, sat Uncle Swan. She pushed open the window, and the scent of spring blossoms entered and Uncle Swan leaned forward to pat her cheek.

"Poor Helga," he whispered. "In front of everyone, the embarrassment."

"What shall we do, Uncle Swan?"

"I'll see you, don't worry. By the bridge, every afternoon, or on Skald Hill, further over. You know where the wild lilacs grow?" She nodded; he went on. "I'll be there ... "

A heavy step on the stairs.

"Quick, down!" cried Helga.

Uncle Swan swung back down the tree.

The bedroom door was flung wide.

Papa stood there, a long whipping strap in his hand.

"The one years ago was not enough, eh?" he said, advancing into the room.

"Papa, no!" Helga said, backing away into a corner.

"I'll have no daughter of mine a pagan," his face white with strain, he advanced steadily. "No more sacrifices there'll be, if I have to kill you."

"Do it now, then, because I'll worship as I please," her head was high, her eyes flashing.

Roughly he caught her by the shoulder, threw her onto the bed, face down. His huge hand caught at the collar of her nightgown. There was the sound of ripping cloth.

The heavy strap lifted, fell, lifted, fell. There was no other

sound in the room than his whistling breath and that awful thud, thud of leather on quivering flesh.

Helga would not cry! Not that much satisfaction would she give him.

Yet her pillow was red from her deep-bitten lip.

A great golden sun speckled through leaves and blossoms of the wild lilacs onto long-legged young Helga Haraldssen who lay beneath them dreaming.

A sound attracted her attention. She half-opened her eyes. Trunk-like legs attached to a thick torso identified her visitor even before his anxious question.

"How you feel today, Yingling?"

"Not too bad. Mama must have come in and put ointment on my back while I was either alseep or fainted.

Great fists opened and shut. His face was a thunder-cloud of passion.

"Except that it would make things worse, I'd give him far worse than he gave you," his voice rumbled like surging surf.

The girl sat up with supple flow of muscles, face serious.

"No, you mustn't interfere, Uncle Swan," she cried. "Not just for my sake or your own. But Papa would take it out on Mama and the others. You know how he is."

The man nodded glumly. "Well, then, do you change your beliefs?"

"I should say not!" contemptuously. "I may be as crazy as he says, but I owe him nothing now. I certainly will not lower myself by changing just because he saus 'must'."

"Good girl!" he boomed, stooping to kiss her cheek.

"Sit down, Uncle. We must do some serious planning."

He sprawled beside her.

"First, I'm going to re-build cairn and altar. Yes, and worship again, too."

"May I help?"

"I'd like to have you."

"'Twill do no good to build it again here on the Hill," Swan thought aloud. There was a space of silence.

"How about somewhere in the woods?" she asked.

"Fine. And just the spot I know. Deep in, from all paths far away."

The sun was but a glow in the sky when they arose, he to go back to the little village, while she mounted her magnificent white Arabian, Frigga, and galloped madly across the fields, her strident Valkyr cry ringing out defiantly on the evening air.

Rising early each morning, Helga scrupulously yet swiftly did all her allotted farm and house chores and a little more before going on her afternoon ride.

She was careful to start out in a different direction each day, yet always wound up in the little clearing in the woods where Uncle Swan would probably already be at work on the new cairn and altar they were building.

Or perhaps he would be lying and dreaming of his beloved ships yet seeing them "the oak ships, the dragon-ships that sailed the stormy seas" as in Viking days of old.

Sometimes Helga would join him in dreams. Her inner sight so plainly could see the great mead-halls of ancient Norse castles. Hear skalds reciting song-lore and saga-lore to massed thousands of warriors who sat at great tables, the fire-light reflecting back from steel-shod war spears, from great two-handed swords and bucklers hanging on high, tapestried walls.

Saw, too, the Valmaids, now clothed in shining white, attendant on those warriors they'd brought from many and many a battlefield at Wuotan's direction, pouring divine hydromel from never-emptied pitchers, serving meat from great, never-consumed boars; this the Valhalla of the Viking beliefs.

This day as she rode up Swan hailed her with cheery voice.

"Just in time to help finish, Yingling!"

Together they placed carefully-fitted stones in position, using neither cement nor mortar, as was proper in such building.

Long after dark they finished.

She made her swift preparations. He assisted from time to time as she directed, for here she was priestess, he but acolyte. Wood, from a great pile she'd gathered from certain trees under strictly specified conditions, was laid on the new altar in runic forms.

"Bless my fires, O Surtr," she implored the God of Fire and of Lightning.

Two drinking horns were set out and an earthern jug containing goat's milk. This to represent the sacred mead, as wine is used in the Christian sacraments.

Small need-fires of the sacred wood were ceremoniously laid at the four cardinal compass points about cairn and altar.

They went back to where their horses were tethered. From her saddle-bags Helga took a long white robe for herself, a long grey one for her Uncle, together with sashes for waist and throat. These they donned.

They came back to the clearing before the cairn.

It was light there now.

The altar fire and the need-fires were blazing.

Yet they had not lighted them.

Swan brought out a small wild-cat he'd trapped that afternoon and held it firmly in his great hands.

Taking a long knife from her robe-belt, Helga approached the cat, which squirmed and spit, but could not escape.

A swift motion, fire-light gleam on shining steel, and Helga dropped knife to snatch up the hlaut-bolli and catch the spurting blood in the sacred bowl.

With willow-twig she sprinkled the fresh, warm blood on their fires. "A full to three, O Odin. Accept our sacrifice; hear our prayers."

They knelt, facing North, lifting high the drinking horns, and they offered full to the gods, toasts first to Odin, then to each particular god or goddess they wished to propitiate or from whom they wished a boon.

Helga implored the Valfather, for aid that she might grow in wisdom with understanding, in courage with gentleness, in pride with humility.

She prayed to Wuotan that she might be found worthy of achieving her high-flung goal of becoming a Valkyr.

Uncle Swan prayed to his Sea-Gods, for rest and contentment after his stormy life. Prayed to the other gods that they listen to the pleas of his niece, that she find favor with them.

So, through the night they prayed.

With the first hint of dawn they arose, re-filled the drinking horns with the symbolic mead, stood facing the East.

As the first rays from the sun-chariot flashed over the rim of the world, they drank deep, praying anew for fulfillment of desires.

Suddenly, a rustling in the underbrush interrupted their prayers.

A horse and rider sprang into the clearing.

"So, here I find you, instead of on the Hill?"

It was Papa.

He rode up to the altar, swept fire and sticks away with great sweep of hand.

He turned toward Helga, one hand reached out to seize her, the other holding that whipping strap.

She stepped back quickly. "No, Papa, you shall never whip me again."

"Defiance from you now, eh?" He reached for her again.

Instead, was dragged down from his saddle.

"No you don't!" Swan shouted.

"You, you idiot Uncle, let me go!" Uselessly Papa struggled, his strength not that of his giant brother-in-law.

"Not until you promise to let Helga alone," shaking him.

The girl rushed up to them. "Please, Uncle Swan, don't hurt him, even though he does beat me for believing in ways he doesn't like."

Both men were looking at her in surprise when crackling sounds behind spun them about.

The woods were ablaze.

"Helga, get those saddle blankets! Harald, help me tear up these bushes, break down those burning limbs!"

Quickly, coolly as though on his old quarter-deck, Uncle Swan took charge.

The three worked swiftly and controlledly, doing their best without tools or water.

But those burning brands and embers had been swept around too great an area when Papa denuded the altar. As fast as one spot would be brought seemingly under control, that tell-tale crackle would swivel the three about to see fire broken out in another spot.

The blankets were soon worthless fragments of scorched and of burned wool. Their clothing was smoldering tatters. Their faces and arms and hands were blistered and bleeding from the heat and the flames.

Suddenly the horses screamed, as burning sparks reached them. Helga sprang to where her beautiful Arabian was tied.

She spoke quiet, soothing words to the plunging, terrified animal. She ripped off the remains of her robe, covered the horse's eyes. She sprang onto its back and rode away, seeing her father and Uncle do the same.

Helga and Swan, from many excursions here, had no trouble keeping the path in the dawn-gloom and smoke. Some distance along, Helga looked back. She could not see her father.

She whirled her horse about, calling his name.

There was a faint, far-off answer.

Recklessly she raced back the way she had come, Swan following but more cautiously.

The fire was spreading rapidly, she could see. When she came up to her father, it was almost upon them.

Papa was lying on the ground, where a low-hanging branch had swept him from the back of his horse.

"Uncle Swan, he's hurt. Here, take him and ride for the farm."

Helga lifted her father in strong, young arms, Swan reaching down a hand to help. The body across his saddle, he turned and he rode swiftly away.

Frigga was prancing about wildly, frighted by smell of smoke, by crackle of blazing wood and thud of falling trees. As Helga mounted, she remembered Papa's horse, another beautiful Arabian she loved almost as much as her own. She could not let it die in the flames.

She spurred Frigga back toward the blazing section, and the gallant animal obeyed, yet nervously. Helga called the other horse by name, time after time she called aloud.

The fire snapped hungry arms towards her and her horse, not satisfied with tress and bushes.

There was a wild scream of fear, and Helga saw Papa's horse.

Almost entirely surrounded by fire, it was frantically rushing this way and that, but not daring to advance through the blaze.

Quickly Helga dismounted, turned her own horse to face the outer edge of the wood, slapped its rump. "To the barn, Frigga!" And the horse was gone.

Cautiously yet swiftly Helga forced her way into and through the wall of flame. In a moment she was beside the frightened horse. She jumped for its bridle, on second attempt caught it. Quickly she leaped onto its back.

Her dress was afire again, but she disregarded that in her attempt to save the animal. She blinded it with her hands, tried to guide it through the least-heavy flames. It refused.

"O Wuotan," Helgan prayed. "Help me to safety. Your Valkyr Maids ride through flame and battle unscathed. Teach me the way!"

She heard a great shout. Uncle Swan, having taken Papa to a safe place outside the wood, had returned, seeking her.

Again Helga urged the plunging steed toward the fast-closing way to freedom. It gave a great lunge and headed straight for the dens-

est part of the flames. Back in the direction of the cairn.

The horse screamed as it ran. Now Helga screamed, too.

Helga's hair was a torch! Her body a flame!

Suddenly, above the road of flames and crash of falling trees, Helga seemed to hear the sound of calling voices, sound of swift-galloping hooves.

The terrified, burning horse ran wild through the flaming wood. Yet this was not what she heard.

Helga screamed again.

Yet closer that pound, pound, pound of galloping hooves, that chorus of voices calling. Did she really hear voices, telling that help was coming?

Now that sound was beside her, all about her. Soft voices, giving courage.

Helga forced open stiff, blackened eye-lids. Were those white faces she saw so close? Glittering shields, racing white horses? Voices calling ... calling?

Sound of sky winds rising. Helga felt herself rising ... riding faster ... riding on nothingness. Below, blurredly, cairn and blazing forest, far, far away.

Was she in the air, the sky, flying? Were those voices, calling ... singing ... and horses' hooves flashing, darting upon the black cloud-ways? And was that Uncle Swan beside her, eyes looking up into the blackness, shining!

The sky seemed filled with brilliance as of ten thousand polished bronze shields reflecting back the Sun-dog's rays; with uncountable voices thundering Viking war-chants.

Black birds circled swiftly to her arms. Somewhere a bridge, a high, bright, rainbow bridge! Somewhere white, white women riding on white, white horses, singing, singing victoriously!

Singing voices ... fading.

Burning trees ... falling.

Among the glowing embers the mortal of Helga and Uncle Swan at the edge of the cairn. And the burning and burning of them went up and up again into the sky, through and beyond and above the clouds.

Ashes flew like blackbirds into the heavens.

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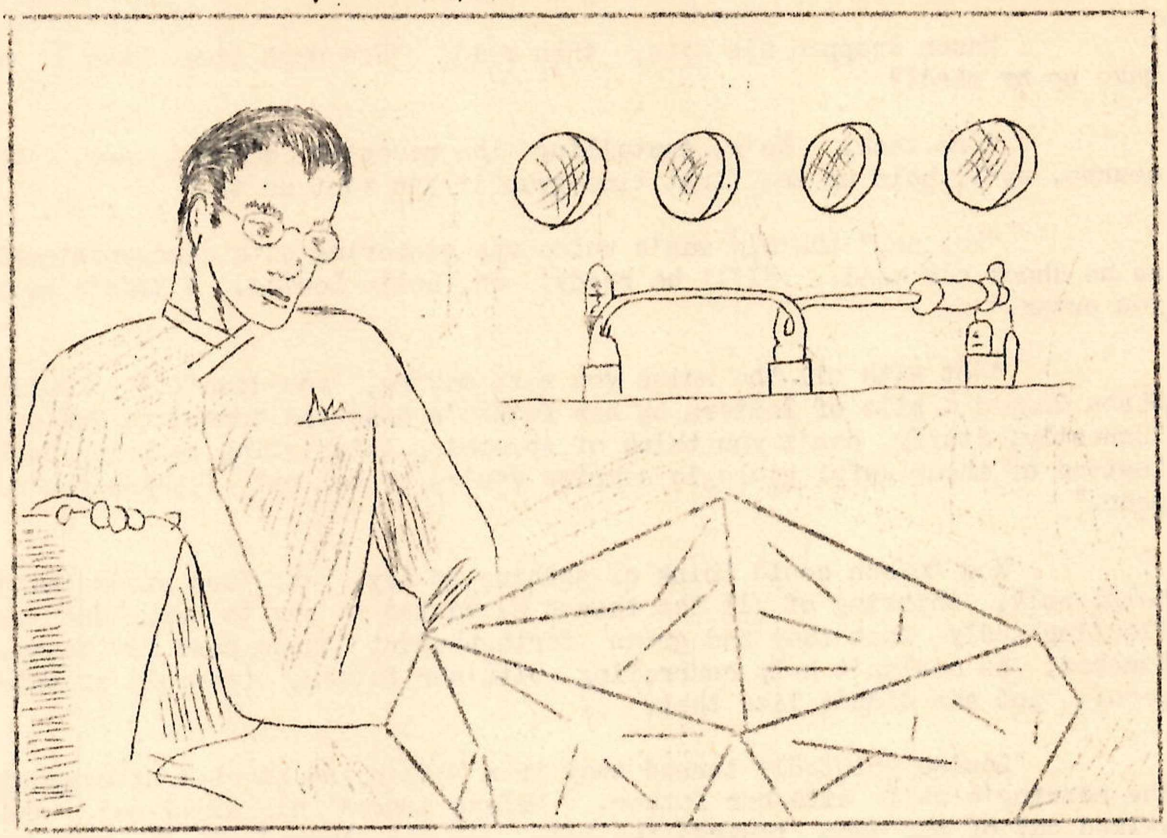
THE STUMBLING BLOCK



by

Eph Konigsberg

"It can't be done." R. A. McKean, PhD, glowered at the little old man who sat at the desk. "It's your money. I admit that. But when you put up the money for the time machine I specifically stated that I wouldn't stand for wild goose chases. The crystals are limited in their scope: they take four years to cool, and they can bring back only something we can definitely locate in the past, both as to time and site."

"But Nero's fiddle. Think of it! The most famous musical instrument in history." Everett Mason looked wistfully at McKean. "You admit you can go that far back in time."

"It isn't a question of time," McKean replied. "We could go back to the Paleozoic age if we wanted to. Perhaps we will, later on. But we can't afford fishing expeditions right at the start. Nero probably didn't play a fiddle, and if by chance he did, we wouldn't know just when or where."

"We have to focus on a particular time, and a particular place, and a particular object that existed in that place and at that time."

McKean sat on the desk and looked at Mason, then said, softly, "I'm sorry Ev, but it's a one shot proposition. We can use each crystal only once, then it fuses and is useless. It'll be six months until our next hunk of quartz is ready. You've got first shot at history. Can't you make it something good?"

Mason dropped his eyes, then said, "How much time have I to make up my mind?"

"One week. We're installing the receptor cabinet now. Of course, we'll hold up the first time-grab if you want us to."

"No, no," the old man's voice was quavering with disappointment as he shook his head. "I'll be ready. Oh, hello Louise. I didn't hear you enter."

"Not with all the noise you were making, you didn't." Louise Mason dumped a pile of letters on her father's desk and turned to McKean. "Honestly, Stuffy, can't you think of something interesting to bring back instead of those awful geologic samples you're so set on? I think you're mean."

Rod McKean could think of nothing to say. He just stood there helplessly, thinking of all the things he wanted to say to her, and reflecting sadly that they had grown farther apart these past few weeks. Somehow, he couldn't help quarreling with her father, (the old curmudgeon!), and she didn't like that.

Louise pointedly turned away from McKean and started discussing the monring's mail with her father. McKean sensed his dismissal, and walked out of the room towards the lab. He was stopped in the hall by Mike Johnson, Mason's lawyer.

"Trouble, Rod?" Mike asked him.

"The old man wants Nero's fiddle. He's had time to think about this thing for months now, and he has to come up with a thing like that." Rod looked at the floor mournfully and said, "He wants something dramatic to show for his money."

"Well, I think Mason should have something to show for all the money he's putting into this screwball venture," Johnson replied. "If you can't think of something, I'll have to work on the problem myself. I'll go talk it over with Louise. So long."

Rod stared after him bitterly, murmured something indistinguishable, and walked on.

McKean heard no more about Mason's desires till six days later. Then Louise and Mike Johnson walked into the lab and hailed him.

"Stuffy," Louise called, "come on out from wherever you are. Mike has a perfectly thrilling idea."

A lean figure clad in blue jeans and a rumpled sweatshirt edged itself laboriously out from under a pile of apparatus and looked up, a

quizzical look in its tired brown eyes. "What now?" McKean asked.

"We were wondering about something really appropriate for father," Louise told him, "and Mike decided to attack the problem logically. You tell him, Mike."

"You see," Johnson almost smirked with self-satisfaction, "the object we get from the past should have an artistic value that will reflect great credit on Mr. Mason. It has to be something that is not obtainable, or is not known of at the present time. Since I know Louise's father is musically inclined, I looked up the history of Stradivarius, to see if I could locate a missing masterpiece of his."

"So?" Rod asked.

"Stradivarius made over fifteen humdred instruments, of which only about six hundred are known of today. In tracing some of his violins, I found that one of them, belonging to Pietro Repartini, was stolen from its owner's home in Milan, in 1752. My office has good contacts in Italy, of course, and it was a simple matter to look up the records. The house is still standing, and the cabinet where the violin was kept is still in existence. You could get its exact location with hardly any trouble ... if you know your stuff."

Rod idly toyed with the idea of taking Johnson apart, then and there, but had to admit to himself that the idea was good. He hesitated a moment before replying, then said, "What if the violin is out of its case at the particular moment we select? We might get a dud, or, worse yet, there's a chance we might get a piece of arm along with it."

"I don't believe you want to do anything for father," Louise burst out angrily. "If you weren't so fussy, you'd go ahead. The odds are in favor of success. Mike said so. Now will you do it or won't you?" She glared at Rod.

McKean hesitated, then replied, "All right. Does your father approve of this idea?"

"You're darn tootin' I do," the reedy voice of Everett Mason came from the doorway, "and no nonsense about it. Mike did a very clever piece of work, and I appreciate it. Imagine having a rare old Stradivarius, one which has been lost to the world." Mason rubbed his hands together joyfully in anticipation.

"It won't be ... "

"No more objections. My mind's made up. That's what I want, so get started on it right away. When can I have it?"

McKean started to finish his sentence, then stopped and said, resignedly, "O.K. Mr. Mason. It'll take a little extra time to dispatch a crew to Italy. We've got to get the location of that cabinet down to a 'T'. Can we budget a trip by air?"

"Yep," Mason assented. "The sooner the better. Let me know when you're ready to work your machine. I want to be there. Come on,

Louise." Mason left the room, Louise following with Johnson in close tow.

McKean called after them. "Mike."

Johnson turned. "What is it?"

"Look now, don't get the old man's hopes up too high. You see, there's a stumbling block about this whole business."

"That's your worry," Johnson said. "Technical details don't interest me, and I don't think Louise or Mr. Mason want to hear about them. If your machine is worth half the money poured into it, produce." He turned again, and walked out.

The audience was tense as McKean flipped the switch. "It'll take about ten minutes to warm up," he said. "Remember, now, although experiments with smaller crystals prove that we can remove objects from the past, this experiment may not succeed. We'll bring back something, even though it's only genuine seventeen fifty-two air. If the violin is in the cabinet at the time our machine is set for, we'll bring it back, of course. Let's hope that it is."

He turned his attention to the crystal before him. It had begun to fluoresce slightly. Above and around it were banked masses of electrical apparatus, each with a projecting antenna focused at critical facets of the crystal.

The real interest of his guests centered, however, on a cabinet to the young scientist's right. Practically embedded in the machinery, it was faced with an extremely thick sheet of glass. It was in that space that the violin was supposed to appear. The minutes passed, and then a little red light glowed on the panel before McKean.

"We're ready," McKean announced. "Miss Mason, would you care to have the honor of pressing the button?"

Louise smiled at him, and indicated her assent. She stepped forward and pushed the projecting stud.

Silently the quartz crystal began glowing with strange colors. Up and down flashes of light ran across the planes of quartz. Suddenly the crystal darkened, then split. The crowd gasped its astonishment.

"It's there!" Mason yelled. "It's there. My Stradivarius. It's there!" He jumped to his feet, hopped around like an ungainly crow and then dashed over to the cabinet. He looked at McKean, who smiled and nodded.

Amid the cluster of outstretched hands of congratulations, Rod did not see what happened next. Then, while receiving the plaudits of those in the room he glanced over at Mason. The old gentleman was standing on a chair.

"Everyone, attention. Attention! To celebrate this event I have brought as my honored guest Andre Vidaux, the great violinist. He has by now inspected this instrument and tentatively pronounced it a genuine Stradivarius, and in fit condition to play. He has consented to perform upon it. Be seated, please!"

The murmur which ran through the crowd quickly subsided. The guests seated themselves, McKean doing so with a peculiar expression on his face. Vidaux stood in front of the blackened crystal and announced, "I am going to play a Paginini Caprice." The patter of applause quieted and Vidaux began.

As the music filled the room McKean looked at Louise. She said nothing but reached over and squeezed his hand. Then she murmured, "You don't know what this means to Dad." McKean smiled uncertainly.

The music stopped to warm applause. Mason immediately rushed up to Vidaux, McKean following. Vidaux turned to Mason with a regretful expression on his face.

"Mr. Mason, may I speak frankly?"

Everett Mason wrinkled his eyebrows anxiously. "Anything the matter?"

"Well, not exactly," Vidaux replied. "I still believe this is a genuine Stradivarius, as I stated. But, frankly. this must have been an inferior instrument. It is good, very good, by the standards of the craft. However, it definitely does not have the color, the tone, the feeling of other Stradivari I have played."

"It must have been the fault of the machine," said Johnson, who had joined them. "My historical research could not have been mistaken. It was described as an exceedingly fine instrument." The lawyer looked at McKean scornfully.

Red McKean's face hardened. "I wanted to tell you, Mr. Mason. And I tried to tell you, Johnson, although you refused to listen. It isn't the fault of the machine at all."

"What then?" asked Mason, sarcastically.

The scientist went on. "This Stradivarius, you see, was taken from a time-location two hundred years in the past. It is, of course, a valuable acquisition, Mr. Mason, and you should be proud of it. But as to its tone, it is impossible to compare it with other Stradivarius violins. You see, there is this stumbling block, I tried to tell you about."

"I don't quite understand," Louise said.

McKean looked at Louise, then at Mason. "The stumbling block was that it had been pulled out of time two hundred years ago, and, naturally, it just hadn't had time to age properly!"

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The Pistol Shot

by
A E Van Vogt

Recently I've been giving a series of talks under the general heading, "An Experiment in Sugguestive Reeducation". Number 9 of the series was titled, "Creative Production". Throughout, the emphasis has been on the importance of techniques in our modern world, and how to use suggestion to establish new patterns and new habits in the nervous system.

Though the beginning writers may not be too aware of the process, he is actually trying to establish an associative habit in his mind. It is vital that this habit be firmly and soundly based in good sense and good technique. Any beginner who has been trying unsuccessfully for a long time may be fairly sure that he has learned some bad habits. He is using techinques that are not adequate, and has unsatisfactory associations established.

The importance of following a pattern can be illustrated in the following fashion. Suppose that you are going to fire a single shot pistol. The order of the process will be (1) you break the gun open, (2) insert the shell, (3) close the gun, (4) aim it carefully, (5) fire.

It may readily be seen that you cannot alter that pattern. If you fire before you've loaded the gun, there's an empty click.

The parallel to story writing is fairly obvious. The original idea might be compared to breaking open the weapon, and inserting the shell. The ammunition you work with is the basic story material, but it takes more than one ingredient to ensure proper firing. It is not uncommon to load a gun with the target already in mind. This is essential in writing a story, for a finished manuscript cannot be fired just any where. When you finally aim it your target is already limited by the type of ammunition.

Another point about a technique: When you first use the pattern, you do it awkwardly and slowly. Every step is consciously adhered to. It take time to carry through. A writer who is not selling , but who has established the habit of fast writing, usually has to start all over again, slowly and painstakingly. In rare cases, he may be smart enough to learn on the run, but this happens so seldom, it is scarcely worth mentioning. Poor techniques, whether bu fast or slow writing, involve another danger. An editor who receives too many duds from a beginner soon ceases to read his stories carefully.

Watch that!

I am happy to see so many members of the LASFS indulging themselves in target practice.

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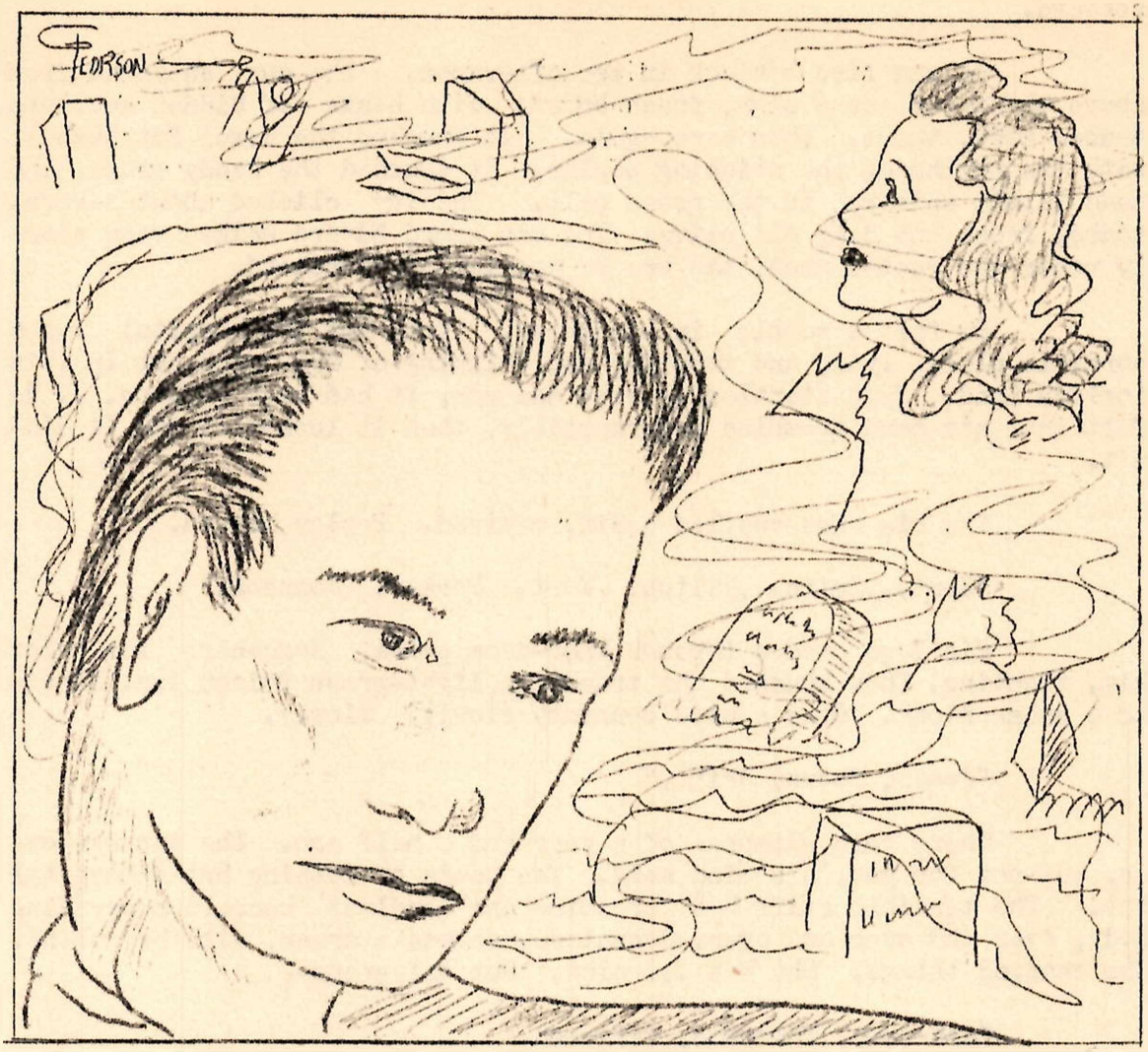
The mimeographer wishes to apologize for the off-setting on some of the pages, but no slip-sheeter was available at the time this had to be run.



BERNICE

by

Con Pederson

In the dusty road a man named Edward got out of a car and stood blinking in the settling heat.

The motion was gone from under him, and he stood on a firm, hot and rarely used road that bobbled and bounced its travelers past the big sign. It read: Worther Cemetery.

There were long shadows lancing into him, aimed from the haze just above the forest rim. The shadows moved to and fro lazily, dogged with the heat.

He moved with them, shading his eyes, looking hard into the fenced area. Bushes and ivies and grass and weeds and big stones at an-

gles. Silent granite, solemn memorial, sweltering away. He shuffled forward.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon. The sun squinted from above the trees as a slow, fresh breeze with hints of hidden moisture traced here, there. then here again. It brushed the Hazel Nut bushes, with the rhythm of the swishing poplar; it touched the weedy grass, and made little shivers in the green pelt. The ivy climbed about several tombs, fresh and deep old olive. The man named Edward walked very slowly under the rusted arch, the breeze cooling his forehead.

He felt a wobble in his knees. Yes, but the hospital was a horrible place, lying and sweating and thinking of her sick out in this forlorn land. Eyes startled -- heat and sun, it had been so long. .. He felt that his hand trembled imperceptibly, then it looked at it. It didn't.

The big oaks rustled again, revived. Poplar hissed.

"Kent...Smith...Hilton. Fort. Parker. Johnson."

His legs waded through knee-deep grass, somewhere far below him, floating. They brushed the trembling light-green Poison Ivy. Skirted a stone block. Over a wire boundary slowly. Slowly.

"Jones, Thorn, White."

There were glimpses of a year and a half ago. The war was over, but not for you, his mind said. Two years of nothing but a hospital cot. The terrible stiff bed creaking and wordless beneath a sweating body, over and over and over. Convalescence was a dream, with her there. She changed things. She was ... nice. But telegrams--

"Anderson, Thompson, Ferguson."

Bernice died. She was a pile of bones and flesh and cloth, no longer a quivering, laughing, bunch of goodness, making snarling little noises all muffled-like, on his shoulder.

White, gray, shining blocks, squares, oblongs, triangles, pyramids. All bleak and quiet as the August sun crept low in the sky. A bird in the forest, voicing against the healthy breeze. Falling limbs, and a plane, far far far away.

The man stood before a granite tombstone. The front of it was shining and glossy, the tiny pits and grain imprisoned just under the gleaming cellophane of polishing. The gray-brown was ruptured and cut away in little marks that glared up at him, with no hint of expression.

"Bernice Thorpe," his throat said. "Bernice Thorpe," his tongue rumbled. "Bernice Thorpe," his mouth uttered quietly, all at once.

Was all life like this? Was everything a blind dead end, very literally dead, while everyone who walks and talks and breathes is a rotted, grinning corpse, waiting to be buried? He saw two hands stretched before his face. Two lifeless, clammy hands, set with lines and blue

veins. They pulsed. These dead, unthinking portions of matter moved stiffly. He dropped them to his side.

The word Bernice was a ringing sound in his ears, that meant "dead", always "dead". He would hear it forever, he felt. Bernice is dead and dead is Bernice. Dead, dead.

A silent, smiling corpse -- a word -- stuck into a pit.

He fell by the cool square of stone, sobbing.

The solitude of the afternoon in the country raced on. Calm, drifting air, and the swollen sun floating down behind majestic oak.

The word Edward meant a man who sat on a headstone, trying to think of a word that meant Bernice. Empty sounds paraded by. The air of night descended lustily, rattling starched parts of his shirt. He breathed damp air.

He watched spectral wisps of fog melt in and out. One of them was named Bernice, the other Edward. They were live, he was dead. Everything was dead except them.

He soon tired of this game. His head was clogged with words, meaningless noises.

Somehow, he felt Bernice near him. He looked at the grave, wishing she would push up beside the three small flowers and smile to him.

Everything was halftone. Nothing moved in the tiny cemetery except the grass and the ivy and the flowers, nuzzled by the new-born night wind.

The light was grey, stale and abrupt, the world a dismal monochrome that hurt one's eyes. Everything was quiet. Everything was a picture, a little square from a candid camera, unreal, stiff, posing.

He wanted her, now that he could not have her. Yet, here she must be, for the little marks made his mouth say "Bernice Thorpe", and an icy mist pointed downward with a momentary finger.

The sun went out -- pouf!

The bleak air moved fast, fast, about his head. It was bittery cold, steel touching his back beneath the flailing shirt, a knife against his throat, probing. Fast! Fast!

Why did his head feel so odd? It was cold outside his mind's retreat, freezing. Yet he swayed with the groggy rhythm of maddened poplar trees.

The word Edward meant a drunken mind reeling helplessly above

a pile of bones and flesh and throbbing veins. The word Edward drifted about, an alienated satellite.

Faster faster went the wind in the forest. The terrible poplar writhed hideously, the grey oak rumbled.

The little place under the sign Worther Cemetery was quiet beneath the rage of the air and the grass and parasites of earth.

Somewhere under the ground people were sleeping. Mr. Kent -- please do not disturb. Horace Hilton -- Rest In Peace. Maude Thorn -- Beloved by all. Quiet zone.

Faster and faster! went the wind upstairs. No bother. Insulated in cool earth and warm satin linings, guarded by the worms and the grubs that burrowed down, alone with the termites that growled happily. No hurry at all.

The word Edward was dashed in a flurry of frost-singed air to the whipping cemetery floor. Its planet staggered blindly, calling.

"Bernice!"

Calmly, calmly. A million years to rest.

He dropped sobbing, screaming, yelling, to the earth again.

Somewhere in a place that once was in a time that once was Bernice was snuggling her head on Edward's shoulder. Memories! He felt her head, he heard her delicate little snarl, smelled her modest perfume, remembered.

Whereas the icy shadows in the mist danced before him, the wind driving pictures into his mind. The trees of the forest, the night cries, the snapping of branches, the swaying of the sign over the cemetery arch, creaking .....

Wake yp! Can't you hear? Ah! You can hear me, can't you? You've overslept again. Again, you hear? Hear me? I'll wake you up...

Visitors upstairs. The warming earth yawned quietly, its guests unmoved. So quiet.

The wind rose on a keen edge. He heard her voice; ah! she did hear him. She'd told him so much that she overslept. But things would change, did Bernice hear? Bernice would have it different. Edward loved Bernice.

The poplar moaned, the sign clanked. Upstairs Edward spoke softly, softly. The wind grew sharper still, ripping. Then all was the touch of her soft arms and cold cheek.

When morning came, they found them there, sitting by the open tomb.

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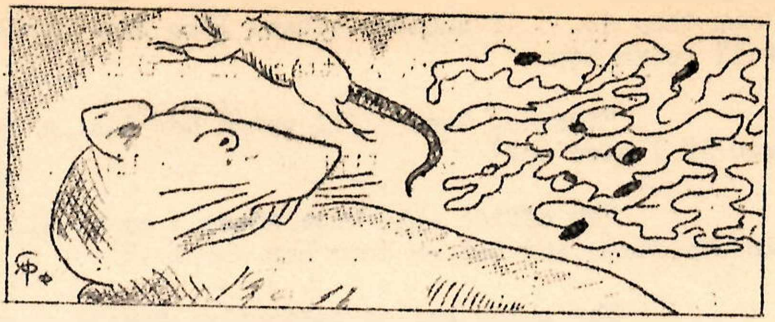
NO NAME

by

L Major Reynolds



The invisible bit of something did a pirouette in the breeze from the open door. It lifted easily, and floated down the long hall. Another door opened, and suction took it into a room. It nestled close to the form of a sleeping dog. Huddling nearer, it seemed to vibrate. It grew with incredible rapidity for a moment. The dog shuddered, moaned, and died.

The thing was stronger now. No longer entirely dependent on the breeze. A sort of mobility had been attained. Steps sounded, and a foot came close. A mighty effort, and the thing was clinging to the side of a shoe. Clinging in the desperation of the desire it felt. The need of the life-forces sensed seeping even through the heavy leather. For long moments it clung, gaining strength with each passing minute.

The shoe was removed, flung away. The thing slid into a corner.

"Helen, I'm going to lie down for awhile. I feel rotten."

The man was on the bed, out of reach. The thing waited.

"All right, dear. I'm going to the store. It's so hot I'll bring some beer. You'll feel better after a little rest. I'm leaving the door open."

Silence, and the thing inching against the warm, once-friendly breeze. Grown now to the size of a mouse, and almost visible. Crazy angles passing over its surface. Almost alive. Hungry, avidly hungry.

The door at last. A stream of ants busily carrying away a bit of sugar. And then the line sprawled, in the pseudo-comedy of death. Tiny bit by tiny bit the thing gained.

A small kitten at play on the path was left in the bare-fanged grin of extinction. Stronger now.

An old man, lying in the welcome shade of a friendly elm, sighed, and looked at nothing. The thing moved easily now.

A group of children, running in the inexhaustible vigor of childhood. Then one was carried away, white and almost drained of the precious energy of life. The thing was active.

"Doc, you've got to save her. It would kill her mother if anything happened to her baby. She isn't going to die, is she?"

"No, but it was a close call. She'll be alright now. I can't figure out what happened. I gave her a checkup last week, and she was

in perfect health. This is one of the things we say couldn't happen and then they do. If another attack like this strikes her, though, there will be no hope."

"Thanks, Doc. I'll watch her like a hawk. Where can I reach you if I have to?"

"My office will know where I am at all times. Call me tonight in any case, and let me know how she is."

The thing waited patiently. Moving at will now, but still hungry. Waiting, in a dry gutter, for anything. Visible at last. Afraid. The first inkling of fear, of discovery.

A pair of lovers, arm in arm, strolling down the walk. A gradual weakening, and the bewildered boy, staring wide-eyed at the crumpled form.

"I don't understand this. Your daughter is the second one today to have this same thing happen." The doctor was puzzled. "And old Mr. Evarts' death was certainly peculiar. The coronor can't find any reason for it. His heart was all right, for I gave him a going-over -- about a month ago. And even Pete Blain's old horse picked today to topple over. Something's fishy about all this."

"What can we do, Doctor?" The father was white-faced from the strain. "We can't let anything like this go on. What could cause anything like it?"

"I've told you I don't know. If I did, there would be something done about it. However, I'm going to call the police. They may be able to find the cause."

The thing lay concealed back of a thick hedge, partially sated. Lying quietly for the moment. A green-winged Luna moth lit on a low-hanging branch. And toppled, to spread crumpled wings in the dappled rays of moonlight. Still the thing hungered, now in the first stirrings of knowledge.

Visible now, to any eyes. Only a faint pattern of the other-world corruscations on its surface. Shapeless as yet, neither knowing nor caring. The only emotion, the sating of the insatiable hunger. Energy to live, energy to build.

The tiny crawling and flying things of the night, each giving, under protest, their bit of life. A wee, heavily-uddered field mouse, hurrying home, stopped to moulder where she lay. Her nest of babies, waiting in vain.

The thing cringed at the sudden volume of loud voices and the blaze of light.

"I talked to Doc myself, and he said it must be some kind of an animal. But none of the kids saw anything this afternoon. I don't believe in spooks." The sergeant of police didn't sound as confident as he would have liked. "Have they finished with that last yard yet? If they have, let's get going on this one."

A hand came through the hedge, directly in front of the thing. The instinct of hunger fought a brief battle with the faint bit of knowledge, and instinct won. The hand groped for a moment, and then it was snatched back.

"Look at my hand! It feels like it's dead. Whatever the thing is, it's in that hedge. Gimme a club."

A smashing impact through the hedge, and a direct hit in the center of the thing. Wave after wave of hitherto unknown pain struck in blinding flashes. Frantically it squirmed away to seek another hiding place.

"I think I hit it! Throw a light over here. The club landed on something soft. Here's the place. See, the open part in the hedge where my club went through. Nothing there now, but I hit something."

The search went on, and the thing, lying under a parked car at the curb, suffered almost audibly. The hard-won energy was fading fast in the unceasing surges of pain. It shrunk rapidly into invisibility again, but with the knowledge it had gained remaining.

The search moved on, and welcome darkness came. A few yards from the thing was the opening of a sewer. Long, agonizing moments it took to travel that small space, then haven at last.

"Hey, Jim, take a look at the sewage before it gets into the tank. Did you ever see so many dead rats? I've seen at least fifty of 'em this morning. Suppose it might be some kind of an epidemic among 'em?"

"Search me, but we better fish out a couple and send 'em to the Board of Health. No use taking chances. I've been here twenty years and never seen anything like it before. Hand me that net."

The thing was thriving, gaining in size, and learning fast. It crouched by the opening of the sewer, and watched the outer world. Never again would it make the mistake of taking too much from any one of those thinking creatures. Always the little from the many.

A dog ventured too close to the opening, and was gone. The thing looked long at the shape before it, and knowledge came to the fore. Slowly it formed into the shape of its victim. A cautious few steps outside, and the glad cries of the children.

The single thought, a little from the many. But the avid hunger remained.

"If I didn't know better, I'd swear there was an epidemic of anemia in this part of town." The doctor was mumbling to himself. "Seems as if every child has the same symptoms. A sort of 'don't care' attitude. They act as if they were about half-alive ..... Half alive? Good God, that must be it. Miss Crane, get me the police!" The doctor was in a frenzy.

The sergeant was speaking. "I know there was something there that night. I felt the club hit it. And what about all those dead bugs and the little field mouse we found? The bunch all kid me about wanting to be a hero, but Doc, I know there was something behind that hedge."

"I know now there was, too, Sergeant, but I can't tell you what you hit. Whatever it was, it's back again, and I'm licked. We can't keep every child in town under lock and key. Well, get the men together and we'll start looking again."

And look they did. In daylight, this time, accompanied by the languid children and a frisky dog. An affectionate dog, who would lean against a leg for a moment or beg for a caress.

The search went on relentlessly. Even into the treetops.

"Hey, kids, whose dog is this? Try to keep him away. I've stepped on him a dozen times."

"That's Rusty. He belongs to him. He plays with us all the time now. He didn't use to like to play with us, but he does now." The ungrammatical insight of childhood.

"Well, keep him with you, and away from us. We're too busy to bother with him. Here, kid, pick him up and hold him."

The moment came when one of the searchers looked in the sewer opening. And pulled out the carcass of a brown dog.

"Hey, that's Rusty! See, that's his collar. I thought he was here with us." A medley of childish voices.

A crumpled form lay in the street. And the friendly dog was gone.

The doctor was grim. "Sergeant, keep a man detailed to this block, to kill that animal on sight. Don't ever let it get near any of the children, or adults either. I have no idea what that thing was, but I know it wasn't a dog. Help me with this child."

The thing was back in the sewer again. Once more, hunger had triumphed over knowledge. It was eager now. The taste of the outside world it had known called for return.

It came out at night now, and watched. Watched, and gained. Watched, and learned. The way of lovers in their nightly strollings. The clasped hands, the stolen kisses. Always a contact. The contact it needed for the taking of the precious energy.

The rats died by hundreds. So little food, in so short a life. So little from so many. Slowly the thing grew.

Knowledge at last of the way. The long, crawling change. The watchful hours taught the need of clothing. And little by little that need was collected.

The shape took the form of a girl.

The thing stood on the street corner, and looked about. It went slowly down the walk, pursued by two ardent males.

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