

# The Alchemist





# The Alchemist

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# AS THE ALCHEMIST SEES IT BY CHUCK HANSEN

With this issue The Alchemist makes its bid to return to life, springing phoenix-like from its dead Ashes. To them as needs aspirin the line forms to the left. When our fifth issue in February 1941 announced our closing the mag till after Denvention time we had high hopes of reopening by that fall. The sudden and crushing sequence of events proved too much to be overcome. Al's old chief editor, Lew Martin is still in the navy, but Roy Hunt is home from the wars and with a couple of other Denver fans to assist it now seems to be practical to re open contact with fandom.

This seems as good a time as any to introduce ye editorial staff. At a pow-wow the other evening the gang decided not to weigh the contents page down with all the names, but to choose one to act for the group and be the editor-officially at least. I was picked to be the goat. It seems only fair therefore, to let you meet the rest of the gang now.

Editor of those matters pertaining--to fantasy literature is Stanley Mullen, who's great collection and vast knowledge of fantasy make him admirably fitted to that post. Art Editor is Roy Hunt, as of old. Bob Peterson is editor-in-charge-of everything-else. In addition there are now with us two Dog-Lars who are at present stationed at Lowry Field. Privates Paul Juneau and Jim Yee have joined our



slap-happy staff and are doing their share to carry the financial burden. It is probable they will appear in these pages from time to time. I will act as a coordinator, to receive the material and the work of the other editors, prepare the dummy and get ready for the big job of cutting stencils. Expense and labor are to be shared as nearly equally as is possible.

We are much in need of material for the next issue and hope ye fen will be as quick to come to our assistance as the very good guys we asked to contribute to this issue. Articles, verse, fiction if short and good, anything of fan interest will be happily considered. If we happen to send something back as unsuitable, pleeezze don't get sore at us. We want to put out a quality mag and that depends on quality material.

Art Widner has promised to do a fan column for us. His Random Ramblings was one of the most liked things in the old Al. Providin' we get some good letters we will bring back the letter section.... B'yond that we can't prophesy. . . . .

We learned, with a nasty shock, the other day when checking thru old mailing lists that thru some misunderstanding the fans with live subscriptions in force when we folded were never paid off. If we can get your address you will get Al till your sub is used up or if you prefer we will refund your dough. If you think your sub was good, write and give us your address, we want to cancel the old debts. Hasta la vista until February-and don't forget we want your material and your \$\$\$



I'm new to the writing game, but I'll do my best. To give a background I'll go into my past history. I was born in Laramie, Wyoming, and spent most of my life there until Uncle Sam became interested in me in 1942. My interest in magazine fantasy and stf. dates back to 1932 when I ran across the Dec. issue of the old Wonder. I didn't find any more until 1934 when I found some old Amazings and Astoundings in a neighbor's trash pile. Since then I've been reading different mags on and off until at present Astounding is all I read regularly. FFM was my favorite in '40, '41, and '42 when they reprinted the old Munsey stuff, but I quit it when their new policy started. I hear that TWS is taking a turn for the better; maybe I'll change to it one of these days. One mag a month is all I have time for now. . . . .

I had heard of fandom years ago but never made the attempt to enter it until I was in the army with some time on my hands. In 1943 when I was at Fort Myers, Florida, I started sending for some fanz.



In Nov. 1943 I found the name of a TWS reader, Hugh Hinchliffe, in Palm Beach, Fla., so I wrote him and arranged to visit him one weekend. Since then I've visited some 30 or 40 fans in various parts of the country and have become an active member of the NFFF. (Incidentally, I'm running for secretary-treasurer and would appreciate any support.) When stationed at Las Vegas Nevada, last year I visited LA three times, taking in such places as the clubroom, "Slam" Shack Tendril Towers and 4e's garage, as well as the usual sights of Hollywood. While there I solved a mystery that had been bothering me for years. Back in 1936 I had an ad in Amazing to sell some old mags and a fellow called me up one night when I was busy. I never heard from him again but on meeting Elmer Perdue in La, I found he had been attending school in Laramie and had called me. I still don't know why he didn't call again.

While in Florida, I was thumbing through Who's Who in America one night and, on seeing that the old time author, A. Hyatt Verrill lived at Chiefland, Fla. I decided to visit him on a 3-day pass. I wrote him and he said he would be glad to see me any time. I got the necessary form seven and started out hitchhiking the 200 miles one day.

I also took in Silver Springs at Ocala, so I didn't arrive until the afternoon of the second day. I stayed until noon the next day. Chiefland is a small place of two or three hundred people, mostly Indians. Mr. Verrill lived about a mile from town in a small house built by himself right in the thick of the live

oak forest. He said I probably thought I'd find him living in an old southern mansion, but I said I knew authors very seldom get rich. He is about 75 and is still very active. He lives with a niece and her daughter. He still writes books but has given up stf as he thinks it has gone to the dogs. (He must have seen the recent Amazings) He also does wood work, paints, and experiments with plants. He, of course, has a number of archaeological objects that are very interesting. He was in secret service work in World War I and had some interesting things to tell about that as well as of his Central and South American trips. As a souvenir he gave me the original jacket of his book "My Jungle Trails". He is a man very much worth knowing and I'm glad to have had the opportunity to meet him.

I will make a few comments on both the fmz and pros in this column. During the summer I received very few fmz but I imagine things will pick up now. For my money the best general fmz recently has been the Sciencefictionist put out by Henry Elsner. The most enjoyed single issue recently was Lynn Bridges' FAPazine Inspiration for April. That contained his opinions on all the stf and pros published through last year. Of the more specialized ones E. E. Evans' The Time Binder and Tucker's LeZombie are the best, the former for serious thought and the latter for humor. Going to the pros, the October issue of Astounding was a little below average in my opinion. Van Vogt's serial appears interesting though there is little in it that is new. Chaos Co-ordinated was rather weak I thought. The earthman always overcoming the insurmount-







with England. Two guesses as to the national interests of the darker powers, despite the fact that Asta Heldrup is cast as a Dane rather than a German.

Extremely proficient in diabolical arts, Asta not only succeeds in gaining control over Joan Mathieson through an opal ring impregnated with evil power, but holds Joan's aeronautic engineer fiancée in a trance-like state, planning to obtain his blueprint plans for Germany and the man himself for her pleasure. To aid her in this nefarious plan, she creates through supernatural means a "doppelganger", or counterpart of the heroine.

The tale reminded me at times of an elaborated "John Thunstone" adventure from "Weird Tales Magazine". The pages bristle with unusual minor characters such as the German doctor who delighted in masquerading as a middle-aged countess, and the unfortunate former young girl friend of Joan's who adored Asta and became little more than an automaton under the will of this unprincipled woman.

The climax is reached when Dr. Zodiac invading the Heldrup abode and seeking to prevent the evil powers from triumphing, informs Asta Heldrup of the truth concerning her own birth, a fact which Asta's father had shrouded in mystery and carefully concealed from his fiendish daughter. Her scheming, corrupt father, it seemed, had deliberately selected for his daughter's birth a day and hour which would, according to the stars, influence her to choose the Left Hand Path. In addition, her birth had been arranged to  
(continued on page 15)

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LET'S  
NOT  
GET  
GAY  
BY  
FORREST J.  
ACKERMAN



ONCE UPON A TIME, before bibliophiles of the ilk of Laney began to read--really to read--their bookcollections, fans were safe in amassing mountains of books and fondly believing they were the best of fantasy. But the cream has curdled.

Ah, blest were we in our days of unenlightened ignorance, when we could blissfully gaze at a copy of "Pandora's Box", think of the great lunar adventure "Drowsy" by the same author (which we have never read either) and Mitchell's well known futuristic burlesque, "The Last American" (which we have read--in Esperanto)...wait a minute, we're getting lost in the complexity of this sentence.

What we (me; I, that is) started out to say was that the day of faith in fantasy-sounding titles is rapidly being destroyed by the Gay Deceiver boys, who rob us of one of life's greatest joys by de-



liberately reading books (can you imagine a crime more heinous?) and reporting that all that glitters is sometimes Fool's Gold.

The day of blind belief is done, is their decree; nite must fall and, with it many stars from the fantasy firmament.

The aforementioned "Pandora's Box" was on the shelves of every collector in L.A. till one day Everett Evans happened to read it and report at the club that it was non-fantasy--the sort of disappointing title which Laney first dubbed "a gay deciever". (As an aftermath fans simultaneously held Grab-bag Auctions at which well wrapped books were purchased on speculation. When all the unwrapping was over, 14 fans found they had simply exchanged copies of--you guessed it--"Pandora's Box".)

Viereck's "House of the Vampire" was the next to fall under the axe. Then Anthony (Weird Tales) Rud's "House of the Damned". Then the great Robt. Chambers became suspect, and it was whispered in some quarters that "The Dark Star" was scarcely fantasy!

Aspersions were cast on Shiel's "Cold Steel" and "Children of the Wind", on Wright's "Elfwyn", and on Philpott's "Lycanthrope".

And then, against all aversions, I--I read a book one day. (As Bradbury would say, not a big book, of course, that would be fantastic; but a pocketbook.

It was a rainy afternoon (strike

that out, this takes place in Southern California) it was a rainy evening (now I'm confused--the locale isn't Alaska!) anyway, it was sometime during the day or nite (got to be this or that), a new fan-mag hadn't arrived for the past 4 hours, lunch was over, I'd listened to the radio and had my afternoon nap, the druggist had phoned and said there was nothing new on the stand but Astounding, I was only 800 letters behind in my correspondence, and my dinner date with Hedy wasn't till 8, so I said to myself, "Fj (that's what I call myself when I'm alone) ((that's what I always call myself)) why not break down, why not give in to this wicked whim this wild impulse--just once--and read one of your books? It might not be so bad as you imagine."

Instantly I regretted my rash decision, but the die was cast, and it was snake eye (a gambling term, or so I am reliably informed by Chas. Burbee).

So I fingered thru the 1300 titles (this part is hard fact, hard as it may be to believe) and picked up the last one I came to: "Lazarus #7" by Richard Sale. It was a swell story, but it was not science fiction. Another Gay Deceiver!

The time may well be not far off when bibliophiles will eye their vast collections with suspicious eyes and think, "Now I wonder....this 'Moon Pool' by Merritt, why it might be merely a love romance. Stapledon's 'Star Maker'--do you suppose that could be the talent scout story that was filmed with Bing Crosby? 'The Doll' by Blackwood--could be about a gunman's moll. 'Sugar in the



Air'--a tale of the tall cane plantations of the Philippines? 'The Coming Race'---annual auto classic at Milwaukee? 'Ralph 124C41'---a convict's autobiography?"

ANYBODY WANNA BUY A BIG BOOKCOLLECTION CHEAP? Two tons at a penny a pound. (Of course I'm keeping my Burroughs.)

Seriously: There's one book I've had in & out of my collection so many times, I've worn the cover and first 13 pages away, just moving and replacing it. It's Chambers' "The Green Mouse".

I bought it because it had an illustration of a mermaid. Later, Laney said it was a Gay Deceiver. I took it out of my collection, on the strength of his word. You who know Laney personally know that his words are very strong.

Paul Skeeters came along. "Haven't you 'The Green Mouse'?" asked he.

"I thot that wasn't fantasy," replied I.

"Oh, yes, you should have that in your collection." Back it went.

Off went a duplicate copy to fantasy book collector, moving picture director Fritz Lang. Bang came a phone call from his secretary: "Mr. Lang does not like this book. He says in the first place it is not fantasy, in the second it is stupid." So I put two copies in the Good Will bag.

Then Rosenblum's Booklist arrived from England. In his collection he list-

ed the tail of the verdant rodent by you-know-who and if you don't you should live so long! He had a thumbnail description of it, thus: "Machine to find affinity." By ghum, that sounded like fantasy--if not stf--to me.

Stuck again: When Charlie Dye called, he cried, "Oh, no! Why Forry, what's this book doing here? It isn't fantasy!"

"No Affinity Machine?" I croaked; "no mermaid?"

"I don't recall anything about an Affinity Machine," Dye replied; "and the mermaid, that's just a costume a woman is wearing to a masquerade."

Yes---NO! No---YES!

Pardon me while I look up a good medium. I'm going to the ultimate authority on this. I'm going to attend a seance and consult Bob Chambers!

x-x  
(continued from page 10)

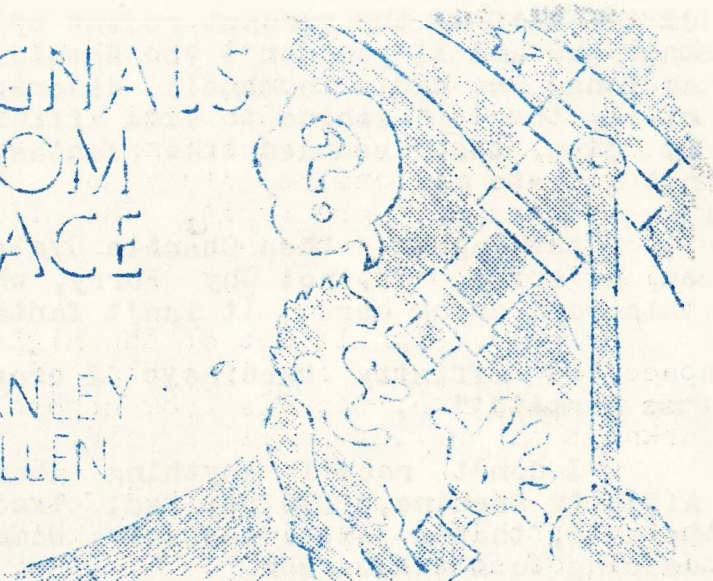
### Tigrina's Book Report

take place upon the sacrificial altar of a Devil-worshipping cult so that at the moment of Asta's entrance into the world the woman who bore her met an agonizing death. As she matured, Asta had been deliberately subjected to further malign influences. The Sorceress' reaction to this news brings the story to a swift and dramatic conclusion . . . . .



# SIGNALS FROM SPACE

BY  
STANLEY  
MULLEN



In the dimness of the observatory high on the slopes of Mt. Evans above New Denver, the silence grew almost tangible. Here, on a certain night in 2446 were gathered a select group of the greatest scientists and most eminent men from every inhabited globe in the solar system. In tense, nervous excitement, they awaited an announcement from Sahc Nesnah, the chief government observer.

Communications had at last been established with one of the nearer stars. So much was already known.

Even as far back as the third decade of the Twentieth Century, light fluctuations in Kappa Cassiopeiae had been noted. At that time it was believed that such variation indicated a probability that the star was about to explode and become a nova, and the star was studied with intense and careful interest. However, as the ages passed and the fluctuations con-

tinued without any noticeable variation, some of the acute interest waned and only a routine observation was kept up. Astronomical developments made possible a more accurate method of recording star behavior, and intensive study of these records finally bore fruit. The fluctuations fell into certain regular patterns endlessly repeated.

Signals, Signals out of the night of space, Signals beating in cycles of endless repetition, Signals from across the darkness of the interstellar void.

The idea, suggested by Nesrotep, that these light variations might be a signal of some kind sent by hypothetical inhabitants of a planetary system of which Kappa Cassiopeiae was the parent sun, was at first ridiculed, but the patterns of regularity were recorded in detail and studied from all angles.

It remained for Yor Thuh, in 2297, to vindicate the theory advanced by Nesrotep. Acting upon a footnote buried in the lengthy and monumental treatise which had taken Wel Nitram two decades to compile, Yor Thuh demonstrated to the bureau of solar radiation the possibility of signalling by means of controlled warping of the light emitted by a parent sun. So was born our own interplanetary communication by means of helioflash, out of detailed scientific study of astronomical phenomena.

Interest was immediately revived in the possibility of the light variations coming to us from Kappa Cassiopeiae being a contrived signal from whatever intell-



igent beings inhabited that system. With in four years Yenrav solved the almost impossible problem of translating the supposed message into a restatement in terms of mathematical formulae, but another half century of blind groping followed before Breh Shco broke down those baffling equations by treating them as a simple transposition cipher.

A premature announcement, fortunately incomplete and inaccurate, brought a storm of hysterical excitement to the people of the four inhabited worlds of the solar system.

At this point, strict government censorship was clamped down, and the full text of that message was never made public. All sorts of reasons for this action were given, but nobody dared give the true one. The truth was that the simple six word question recieved from our sister sun and its family of worlds revealed such a hell of pessimism and despair that our various governments agreed upon the necessity for complete suppression of the message, at least until a reply could be sent, and some sort of answer recieved from Kappa Cassiopeiae.

It was feared, with some justification that once the public had felt the dreadful impact of that message and realized the dire implications for ourselves, nothing could hold them. All controls would immediately break down, anarchy would result, and in the first access of despair some of the unsound ones might destroy our entire system by plunging it into the holocaust of complete atomic disintegration.

But a reply must be sent. An inevitable negative reply to that fearful six word question. A council of philosophers was held and a message decided upon while the semantics bureau busied itself working out a simple code which would be almost instantly intelligible to the Cassiopeians. By our improved helio-flash, the message -- condensed to four simple words, "No, there are none" -- was sent winging across the eternal darks of interstellar space on soundless vibration

Then, through long years while those vibrations traveled at the speed of light, the solar system waited, the masses in their blissful ignorance, the intelligences with an awe-filled forboding---all wondering what effect our answer would have on the worlds of our sister star.

Exact calculations were entered into determining within possible seconds, depending upon the unpredictable human or in human elements involved, the precise time which must elapse for our message to reach its destination and be acted upon. Would the reply to our message be another signal, a simple acknowledgement, followed by a symbolic joining of hands across the deeps of space and time, or would our only answer be the distant view of holocaust? No one knew.

Sach Nesnah turned from the eyepiece of his precision telescope and looked about him in the dimness. An audible sigh rose from the assembled group. Was the period of nerve-racking suspense near an end? It was.



and Sahc Nesnah cleared his throat, and spoke, solemnly and with reverence, for this was an awesome moment.

"Gentlemen," he said, "the time is nearly at hand." He gestured toward a huge televisior screen and closed a switch. Instantly the reflection of a section of the night sky was projected upon the screen.

Sahc Nesnah continued. "I will not waste words. All of you know why we are here tonight. We have gathered to observe the reaction of the Cassiopeians to that reply we sent to their question. Whatever that reaction may be, it will tonight be our solemn and inescapable duty to decide what we dare tell the public. I warn you, gentlemen, it will not be easy to satisfy them with any thing less than the truth -- and if we give them the truth, Heaven knows what may happen here.

Sahc Nesnah glanced briefly at the gigantic sidereal chronometer. "It will be only seconds now."

Absolute silence brooded ominously within the observatory. All eyes and minds were focused upon the screen with the familiar pinpoint pattern of Cassiopeia projected and enlarged for all to see.

A message tape connected to the Spectrographic Analysis Laboratory began to click. In the unearthly quiet, the faint mechanical sound loomed loud and terrifying.

Sahc Nesnah glanced at the message and the dimness hid his sudden pallor. But he nerved himself to speak.

"Gentlemen", he said, "I fear the worst has happened. Our analyst has reported an ominous shift in the spectrum of Kappa Cassiopeiae. We now have a dark line spectrum with a shift toward the violet."

The image on the screen began suddenly a change, slight but quite noticeable. The pinpoint of light that was Kappa Cassiopeia trembled, and as they watched became a slowly spreading blur of dazzling light. With hideous deliberation it transformed itself into a blinding smudge of flame pulsing against the darkness.

Sahc Nesnah left his post and faced his audience. His hands passed before his eyes in a nervous gesture, as if he hoped to wipe away the monstrous vision of light upon the darkness which had burned into his very soul. On his face was an expression of mingled reverence and horror. His voice trembled with cosmic sadness, and the weight of cosmic despair oppressed his mind. He spoke for the last time.

"Gentlemen, it is as we feared. Our stellar neighbors, who dared defy the difficulties of interstellar communication, who faced and conquered the uttermost-scientific problems of the universe, have failed at last. They were equal to every problem save the final one of man's weakness, his follies, and his inevitable limitations. Yet even in their failure, they were great. We must respect and



mourn our stellar cousins. whoever or whatever beings they were. For at the last, they have dared to destroy themselves and look into the unveiled face of Ultimate Truth. . . . .

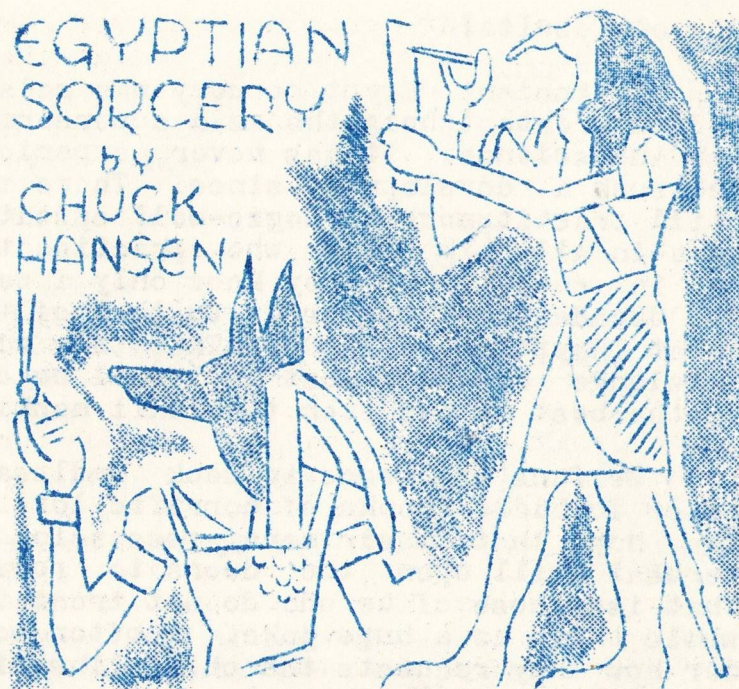
"So far as we know, our solar system is alone among inhabited universes. And we have our own final duty to face. In a few moments, the observatory will be deluged by inquiries. The public will demand to know what has happened. And why. And we will have to tell them. It is up to you to decide upon a way to break the news to them, to find a way to soften the blow, to minimize the shock which will come to them when we release the full text of the six word question from Kappa Cassiopeiae, with its frightful context -- the full realization of ultimate spiritual tragedy for mankind. It will be up to us to tell them in such a way that they will not follow the example of our friends on the planet that was Kappa Cassiopeiae, that they will not plunge our own universe into the same atomic holocaust we saw tonight in Cassiopeia. I, for one, do not know how it is to be done. Since the problem is yours, you must now hear the question. . . . .

For the first time in the years since it was decoded and the reply sent, I am at liberty to reveal that six word question. . . . .

"Here is the question: 'Do You Know Any New Jokes?'"

## EGYPTIAN SORCERY

BY  
CHUCK  
HANSEN



Black Magic always has and probably always will play an important part in the realm of fantasy literature. Such deep interest is not strange when one realizes that it is born of man's universal belief -- or if you prefer --- superstition. I will risk being considered all kinds of a nut by saying here and now that I do not for a minute think that it is merely superstitious nonsense. If this is madness blame it on my being a fantasy fan. Such people are expected to be a little - mad. No, the belief and practise of sorcery are too universal to be summarily dismissed. It makes little real difference whether -- as the superstitious native believes -- the complex magical ritual is what does the trick, or -- as I believe -- the fiendishly clever application of psychology and hypnosis does the damage. It is results that count and the sorcerers



do get results!

In Ancient Egypt sorcery was raised to its greatest heights as a supernormal art and science. It has never experienced such a development since. There are still practitioners of magic--well educated ones--in all big cities who practise the art in secret, but they know only a weak and decadent art compared to that of the great Egyptian wizards. That this vast knowledge has been lost may well be one of the best breaks ever to befall mankind.

We fans are prone to seek endlessly after forbidden books of horrific lore in the hope that their mere possession or perusal will open the doors to power. That is, those of us who do not treat the whole thing as a huge joke. I often wonder how many requests the chief librarian at the Library of Congress receives each year for information about such books----The Necronomicon--Unausprechlichen Kulten--The Book of Eibon--and others. Alas, we will never see most of the books we seek, because most of them never existed outside of the works of well known and read fantasy authors. But there are a few--oh so few--real books of lost magical lore. For the most part they are unobtainable and illegible--unless you are learned in ancient languages--but there are a few both readable and obtainable. Several of these are the work of great Egyptian Adepts and are many centuries old. English translations of several are readily obtainable in most libraries. This by no means is to say that the great ancient wisdom is readily to be had for the taking. These sacred works are all esoteric to a great degree. Anyone not

initiated into the mysteries is unable to understand them. It was in this fashion the priests concealed their secret wisdom from their own people, and it works just as well today.

One of the great magical books of ancient Egypt, one of the greatest of such works of all time was the "Book of the Dead" which is open to study in all large libraries. It is a vast collection of prayers, formulae, and rituals to protect by means of magic the soul or sahu on its journey thru the underworld. It was used in this way by the common people who probably had no idea that to a priest it might reveal other secrets of magical art.

The age of the "Book of the Dead" has never been determined, and probably never will be. It is definitely pre-dynastic, 70 or more centuries old! That is old enough for any of man's written works to be treated with profound respect. There have been found, fragments of some hundreds of copies of the book and many thousands must have existed. Books of papyrus are perishable. There are many variations between different copies of course, as is to be expected when all were hand copied.

No Egyptian family would be without a copy of this all important work and all higher class people had a copy buried with them and the more important verses inscribed on the sarcophagus and upon the walls of their tombs. Those who were unable to read--most of the people--learned the prayers by heart and passed them down by word of mouth. The educated priest-



hood kept the populace so concerned for the welfare of their souls (sounds familiarly modern--times haven't changed so much) that there was little danger of their discovering the double purpose of these writings. Where better to hide any thing you wish to keep safe from detection than to place it--nay force it--into the hands of a people forcibly kept in ignorance? They will never think to seek it there.

In case all this talk of esoteric literature is confusing, do not get the idea that the Egyptians had any patent on it. A sterling example of a book of very ancient origin that is esoteric is the Bible. There are, unfortunately, nearly as many interpretations of the Bible as there are interpreters. Possibly all of them had some glimpse of the hidden truth or perhaps all are wrong. If anyone is able to use the ancient art of anthropomancy and can bring forth the spirits of the dead for questioning I wish he would summon up the shades of the authors so that we might know, once and for all, what they really did mean.

The doctrine of elemental spirits appears to have been familiar to the great wizards of the Nile Civilization. One of the chapters of the "Book of the Dead", the 108th is titled "The Chapter of Knowing the Spirits of the West", and is thought to deal with elementals. The practise of causing injury or death to an enemy by means of a doll or other image is of undetermined antiquity, probably it is nearly as old as man. Remains discovered in the caves inhabited by Pleistocene Man seem to prove them familiar

with it. That the ancient Egyptians know of it all too well seems evidenced by the 7th chapter of the Book, which begins, ... "Hail thou creature of wax, who ledest away victims and destroyest them..... may I never become weak and helpless before thee. . .".

According to the Egyptian religion, a very complex one, in addition to the physical body of man there were about 9 other components, variously defined by different schools of thought. The Ka was apparently the ego or individuality of a man, and lived in the tomb or wandered about at will. We have already mentioned the Sahu or spirit-body (soul). Another of these most important constituents of man was the Khu, believed to be the magical powers of the adept. The Egyptian sorcerers believed that the Khu of the adept could, at his death, enter the painted likeness of the man upon his sarcophagus or any other place prepared for it. It was thought that a man by resting in the sarcophagus of a great wizard while in a condition of trance could absorb some of the magical force.

Believed to be the greatest of all ancient magical books is the "Book of Thoth". There is no actual proof that it ever existed, but so much has been written about it and by so many peoples, that it is quite probable some such book may have existed. It was supposed to have been written by the Egyptian god of wisdom and learning, Thoth the Ibis-headed. Among the ancient writings were found the Egyptian Tales. In the Tales--which are available at some libraries---in "Ahura's Tale" we read of this book: "If you wish



so much to read writings, come to me, and I will bring you to the place where the book is which Thoth himself wrote with his own hand, and which will bring you to the gods. When you read but two pages in this you will enchant the heaven, the earth, the abyss, the mountains, and the sea; you shall know what the birds of the sky and the crawling things are saying; you shall see the fishes of the deep, for a divine power is there to bring them up out of the depth. And when you read the second page, if you are in the world of ghosts, you will become again in the shape you were in on earth. You will see the sun shining in the sky, with all the gods and the full moon."

"Then the priest said to Na-nefer-ka-ptah: 'This book is in the middle of the river at Koptos, in an iron box; in the iron box is a bronze box; in the bronze box is a sycamore box; in the sycamore box is an ivory and ebony box; in the ivory and ebony box is a silver box; in the silver box is a gold box, and in that is the book. It is twisted all round with snakes and scorpions and all the other crawling things around the box in which the book is; and there is a deathless snake by the box.'"

This remarkable description may, of course, be part of a ritual with independent esoteric meaning, but it is a discouraging description for any who may have ambitions of ownership of the book. The latter part of 'Ahura's Tale' describes the extremely unpleasant consequences to Na-nefer-ka-ptah and all his family--even into the second generation--for having obtained and used the book.

Also in the "Egyptian Tales" in the 'Tales of the Magicians' we read in the first, 'Khafra's Tale' the following: . . . "Then said Uba-aner, 'Bring me my casket of ebony and electrum.' And they brought it and he fashioned a crocodile of wax, seven fingers long: and he enchanted it, and said, 'When the page comes and bathes in my lake, sieze on him.' And he gave it to the steward, and said to him, 'When the page shall go down into the lake to bathe, as he is daily wont to do, then throw in this crocodile behind him.' And the steward went forth bearing the crocodile." You can guess what happens next. However, lest any fan should be tempted to try this on his neighbor let him think upon the fate of Uba-aner. The Pharaoh, learning of this necromancy ordered the crocodile to sieze Uba-aner, which it did and disappeared permanently. Then the king had Uba-aner's wife brought forth, and burned and her ashes cast into the river. The Tales are full of such great tales of Egyptian magic, but this is already becoming too lengthy and rambling to quote more.

The great Harris Papyrus mentions several other magical works of vast power. It is entirely possible that these books existed. Books which were composed of papyrus scrolls are very perishable and only good fortune and the massive thoroughness of Egyptian architecture have saved the many papyri still existing--after the passing of several thousand years.

There probably has never been a people who lived so closely their everyday lives with magic. It is the essence of



their religion, breathes thru all their literature and art, and if we could take half of it at face value they were the most advanced people the world has ever seen in this respect.

Certain groups today maintain that they possess all the powers reputedly conferred upon the holder of the "Book of Thoth". Their magic text is the Taroc, claimed to be of Egyptian origin. The Taroc is a series of cards bearing very elaborate symbols upon them. It seems very likely that it was the origin of the design for our present day playing cards. Those who uphold the Taroc as the greatest of all magical works say that anyone who really understands the mystic designs wields all the tremendous power said by the ancient writings to be conferred by reading the "Book of Thoth". Some indeed claim that the Taroc is derived from the Book and is the same thing in the form of abstract symbology. Hmmm well maybe, I don't know anything about it so I'm not a qualified judge, but I cherish very strong doubts. If their claim is true, then all I have to say is that obviously none of the holders of the Taroc can understand it. That I can believe after looking at the symbols. All they spell to me is a game of solitaire. And if these would-be wizards don't understand their sacred Taroc its a damn good thing say I. All this turmoil-wracked and very cockeyed world needs now is a coupla Egyptian Wizards.

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Enter: The Shakespearian Ghoul, holding-a skull . . .

"Alas poor Yorick-I gnawed him well".

-- Rare Old Corn



## SEVEN FOOTPRINTS TO SATAN

I think this is the best example of what Hollywood can do to give any author a black eye. Fortunately for Merritt it did not impair his reputation; but on the other hand, it may not have helped it at the time.

This picture was produced by First National back in 1929 -- which is no credit to First National. Perhaps this product is one of the reasons they do not exist today. Too, it may have taken a year or so off Merritt's life. The money he recieved for film rights couldn't have compensated for much; and in his own words he referred to the picture as a "wretched product". The original story could have been adapted to the screen with very little change. But what do we get? We get a burlesque.

Now for the film. In the opening scenes we find our hero, Jim Kirkham, taking pot shots at targets in his priv-



ate shooting gallery to get himself in trim for a proposed African adventure. He is quite a good shot. What with the large "Harold Lloyd" spectacles he's wearing, there is no excuse for his missing. His girl friend, Eve, a well stacked blonde, and Kirkham's uncle, a well filled barrel, plead with him to forsake his daring trip. But Kirkham, stout fellow, will not hear of it, and with squared shoulders firmly says he must go!

At this point I had better mention that the picture was a silent production which is the only creditable thing one can say about it. Seeing this wholesale mass of corn displayed before your eyes is bad enough -- but hearing it too would have been too much, even for First National.

Things start happening now. Eve and Kirkham are forced into a sealed sleek limozine by very sleek people and taken for a long ride out of town, arriving finally at a huge mansion. Here my memory dims as to details of the picture -- which I think is fortunate. Within the mansion is the largest assortment of goons ever to be put on the screen: dwarfs, dog-faced men, thugs, chinamen, women who look like vampires, and to complete the bill of monstrosities --- a gorilla is introduced in one of the scenes. The gorilla, however, looks less monstrous than some of the humans. This fact is true in everyday life.

Eve and Kirkham have a goodly variety of adventures in the mansion which seemed to be lacking in doors but made up for it with secret passages at every turn.

Kirkham is ordered to appear before Satan - a hooded figure in black - to determine his fate by walking up the seven foot-prints. He treads on the fatal steps and by agreement becomes Satan's servant for a year.

This incident is followed by more escapades through weird and elaborate settings until finally Eve and Kirkham wander into a vast hall where the large assortment of queer people are holding a banquet. And side by side they see friend and foe of their adventures, eating and chatting amiably. At the head of the tables Kirkham gets his greatest surprise as he sees his uncle.

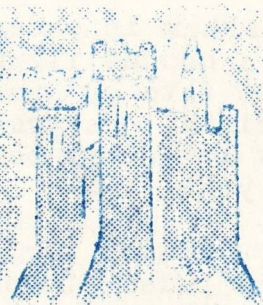
"I am Satan" states Uncle to nephew, and explaining how the whole fantastic affair was arranged for his benefit to give him a fill of adventure and cause him to forget his African trip. Eve, the wench, was in on the whole plot!

So Kirkham, stout fellow, has had his fill of adventure; Eve hooks Kirkham. and everyone has had a good time all around except the audience.





# EBONY TOWER BY STANLEY MULLEN



Inaugurating a new department requires some statement of policy. In the first place I am a connoisseur not a critic. When I mention a book, it is for the simple reason that I like it and believe that it will be of interest to fans similarly inclined. I have no intention of carping or knocking any book, and if I occasionally mention a book and then damn it with faint praise, I do so because I feel that it will be of interest to others even if I do not care too greatly for it.

Secondly, you will not find too much comment on the market values of scarce items. I am interested in collecting the things I love, not in haggling over them in the market place. I have always resented any implication that current prices had anything to do with the pleasure I take in acquiring a fine or scarce item. As my wife tersely puts it, "What difference does it make how the price goes up on these books you buy? You'd never sell any of them anyhow." True, I am merely gloating because I got my copy when I could afford it. Fortunately for domestic harmony, my wife is as voracious a reader of fantasy as I am, and would kill me if I did sell them.

Enough preamble. Below I list a few items as my suggestion for a basic lib-

rary of non-fiction books dealing with the fantasy backgrounds of Witchcraft. Demonolatry, et al., appending a brief list of readable fiction on the same subject.

"Witches Still Live" by Theda Kenyon is a popular essay on the premise that witchcraft is not only still alive but a potent force in the world today. Her book gives a readable but necessarily brief survey of the customs, practises and beliefs of historic witchcraft which have survived, fortunately in a diluted form, to the present time. The book is published by Ives Washburn, N. Y., 1929. Miss Kenyon's treatment is more folksey and popular in a general way than Montague Summers' heavily documented works in a similar vein, and if she lacks Summers' exhaustive scholarship, she also avoids his naive gullibility.

Most satisfying of the many works in this field by Summers is his ubiquitous but solid and monumental "History of Witchcraft and Demonology" (Knopf, 1926) which covers the historic approach to the subject matter in a manner at times reminiscent of Father Brown's morbidly virtuous pursuit of the criminal to his lair. Summers' History is valuable to any student interested in the subject, if only for the wealth of quotations from sources rarely available to the general reader. Other worthwhile works by the same author on phases of the subject are his "Geography of Witchcraft" (Knopf, 1927) --- and a fine, long-needed translation of the unpleasant Sprenger's "Malleus Maleficarum."



In a still more scholarly vein, although it concentrates more upon a single phase of the witch-religion, is Margaret Alice Murray's controversial "Witch Cult in Western Europe," which has perhaps been overpraised by some critics and probably overcondemned by others. As far as I am concerned, Miss Murray makes out a very good case for her theory, which briefly is that the witchcraft persecutions which drowned Europe in a sea of blood and cruelty from the twelfth to the eighteenth century was not merely a delusion of the credulous and superstition-ridden bitots but was an attempt to suppress with savage violence a deeply rooted and well organized revolt against the twin tyrannies of autocratic church and feudal state.

J. W. Wickwar's "Witchcraft and the Black Art", Herbert Jenkins, London, no date, is a delightfully informal and chatty essay, dealing in a light and at times flippant manner with the beliefs, practices and general idiocies of witches, warlocks, and similar dabblers in the black arts. Either Mr. Wickwar is not aware of Miss Murray's study, or he chooses to ignore her theory, for he obviously considers the whole matter a mirage of superstitious nonsense inflicted upon a gullible and ignorant world by the self-hypnotized witches and their bigoted and sadistic persecutors. While there is much to be said for this point of view, the mass of evidence seems to weigh the scales in the other direction, and Mr. Wickwar is not a sound enough critic to change any opinion of mine. At this late date, no absolute truth is likely to come to light, and the reader

must weigh the evidence and select a theory according to his own temperament. Be that as it may, Wickwar's study is one of the most witty and entertaining of them all, and if Mr. Wickwar's work is at fault in finding humorous a situation which was never that to the people involved, he is at least more readable than many of the solemn owls who have dealt with this material.

A more sombre treatment is obtainable in Michelet's "La Sorciere" (Paris, 1878) available in translation from the Walden Book Company under the title "Satanism and Witchcraft". A very different picture this, from Wickwar's quasi comedy. We find the witch depicted as a tragic and terrifying figure against a nightmare backdrop of medieval and renaissance cruelty and horror. Michelet's style, even in translation, tends toward hysterical rhapsody, and the subject is well-suited to his pen. The work is scholarly and in the main logical, after its own peculiar fashion, amassing a wealth of significant descriptive detail about typical incidents of the period with hair-raising effect. The result is both convincing and depressing, leaving the reader with a hideous conviction of the innate cruelty and viciousness of man kind. Though marred by excessively romantic treatment and occasional boresome discursiveness, this work can be highly recommended.

An excellent general view of the Black Arts and their practitioners may be had from "Witches and Warlocks" by Philip W. Sergeant (Mutchinson, London, 1936), which is very well done within the limits



of its length.

Somewhat similar is Sax Rohmer's non fiction "Romance of Sorcery" -- a fine, straightforward, and gripping account of sorcery and the black arts from what is mainly a biographical point of view. By selecting certain personalities typical of the periods and movements, the writer presents a noble pageant of developing magical beliefs through the ages. His work is extremely well done and interestingly handled. While it makes no pretense to a profound or thorough study, it is sound and picturesque, leaning toward a poetic and mystical viewpoint rather than a serious and scholarly one. However, within its pattern it presents a stimulating and convincing picture; the author is well-versed in his subject and writes well of esoteric matters.

Without Satan there could be no Satanists. In homage to the Dark Master, I list two works dealing with his biography, Louis Coulange's "Life of the Devil" (Knopf, 1930) which is a long, precise and logical treatise (perhaps too logical for the Lord of Chaos) giving a skilfully patched together biography, excellent illustrations ---- and Margaret Alice Murray's "God of the Witches", which I have not read, but which has been highly recommended to me.

Certain chapters in Paul LaCroix' 2 vol. "History of Prostitution" (Covici-Friede, Inc., 1931) are among the finest short works available on Incubi, Succubi, and the Black Mass. Incubi and Succubi are treated in chapter LXIII, under the heading Supernatural Aspect of Prostitu-

tion. The Black Mass chapter (LXIV) is a minor classic and deserves a separate printing, distinct from the whole work which is rarely come by and scarcely known except to scholars and serious students.

Some passages in Seabrook's "Witchcraft" and also scattered items in "The Magic Island" are fascinating but to me at least unconvincing, due largely to Seabrook's personality and a vague suspicion that he is a journalist skilfully making a good story better.

Since the subject of Voodoo has come up and I must mention Witchcraft's left-handed cousin, J. J. Williams' fine non-fiction study, "Voodoos and Obeahs" is back in print. It is a very scholarly and accurate work, totally devoid of all those lurid details so delightful to all true fantasy fans, but containing a wealth of reliable information. (Dial Press, \$3.00). There is also a small book, now this year, by Robert Tallant, "Voodoo in New Orleans" (Macmillan, New York). There are few good books on Voodoo and two like these should be treasured.

Typical of the fine ephemera on the subject of witchcraft is a longish article "Witches There Were" -- by my wife (sic!) Sophia Magafan -- which saw publication in a small professional magazine of extremely limited circulation. This work is a study of the psychological effect of witchcraft beliefs in rural Poland, and is mainly from word of mouth accounts by people involved. She has also authored a shorter work, "Witch of the Lake", dealing with modern Greek folk



lore of witchcraft, especially with one water-witch of curious and unpleasant powers, one blow of whose hand could cause disturbing alterations of form in her victims. One grieves to think of similar fine works buried in fugitive magazine publications of this kind.

For a more detailed listing (especially regarding ephemera and works not readily available to the general reader, consult the bibliography of almost any of the works I have mentioned.

Listed hurriedly, for my allotted space is running short, are a few entertaining volumes of related fiction, some well-known and loved, and a few less so.

Virginia Swain's "The Hollow Skin"; A. Merritt's "Burn, Witch, Burn"; Stephen McKenna's "Superstition"; Edgar Jepson's "Garden at No. 19"; Mary Johnson's "The Witch"; Percy MacKaye's "The Scarecrow" (a play from which one of the earliest fantasy movies was made); Stanley Hart Cauffman's "The Witchfinder"; Hammond's "Road to Endor"; Esther Forbes' "A Mirror for Witches"; Al. de Comcau's "Monk's Magic"; Jean Buchan's "Witchwood"; Evangeline Walton's "Witch House"; Huysman's "La Bas"; Eleanor M. Ingram's "The Thing From the Lake"; North and Bantell's anthology "Speak of the Devil"; and for a very modern witch acceptable to modern sci-fi fiction, William Sloane's "To Walk The Night", now available in paper libraries at \$.49 which is cheap enough for a swell yarn.

THE END



