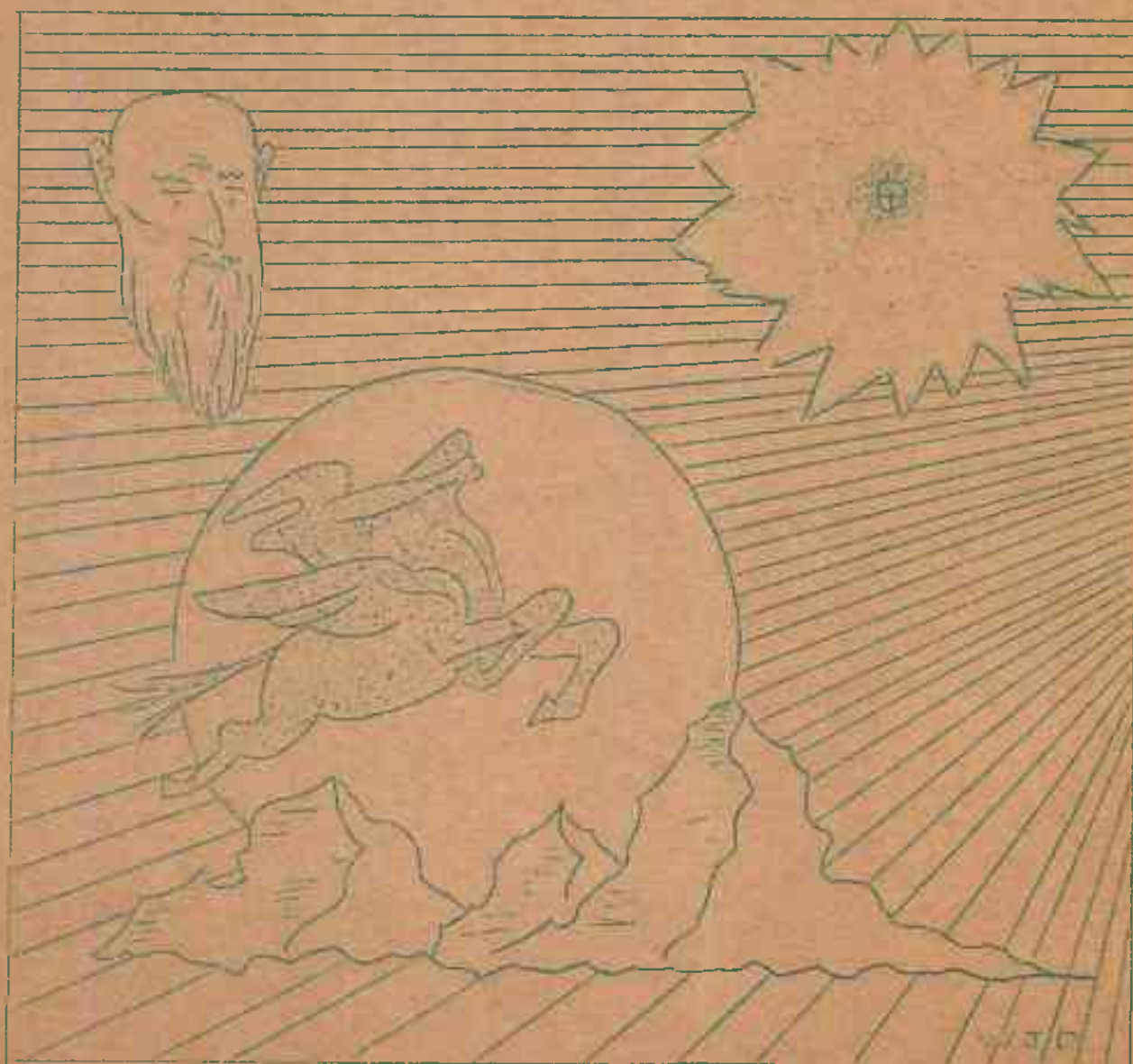


# PHILADELPHIA

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## C O N T E N T S

### STORIES:

The Tree on the Hill	by Duane W. Rimel	4
Ygdrasil	by John F. Burke	12
Dream	by Damon Knight	15
The Artizan's Reward	by R. H. Barlow	16
The Single Strain	by Jack Chapman Misko	17
The Questioner	by R. H. Barlow	19

### DEPARTMENT:

Editorial Illumination	3
------------------------	---

Cover by Walter J. Daugherty  
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## EDITORIAL ILLUMINATION

We think that you deserve a word of explanation about this issue of Polaris. It's not the well-balanced magazine that you have a right to expect. All can be explained quite simply. Since ye Editor is leaving (or has left, long before you read this) Los Angeles for the summer, and does not wish to invest in a mimeograph just yet, he is issuing this on the LASFS mimeo on June 2. No letters have arrived yet on #3, so--no Observations. A movie column would become completely out of date in three months, so--nothing by Ackerman. And, to make matters worse, we had no poetry on hand, so this time you got an all-fiction issue. But we promise better things for next time....

And speaking of next time: The coming issue will be our First Anniversary Issue, and, following the usual custom of fan magazines we will try to provide an especially good number. We can't promise more pages -- 20 is the limit for the time being -- nor can we promise a printed issue or a solid line-up of professional authors or anything fantastic like that. But we can promise that we'll

(Continued on Page 11)



# THE TREE ON THE HILL

*by Duane W Rimel*

## I

Southeast of Hampdon, near the tortuous Salmon River gorge, is a range of steep, rocky hills which have defied all efforts of stoutry homesteaders. The canyons are too deep and the slopes too precipitous to encourage anything save seasonal livestock grazing. The last time I visited Hampdon the region---known as Hell's Acres ---was part of the Blue Mountain Forest Reserve. There are no roads linking this inaccessible locality with the outside world, and the hillfolk will tell you that it is indeed a spot transplanted from his Satanic Majesty's front yard. There is a local superstition that the area is haunted---but by what or by whom no one seems to know. Natives will not venture within its mysterious depths, for they believe the stories handed down to them by the Nez Perce Indians, who have shunned the region for untold generations, because, according to them, it is a playground of certain giant devils from the Outside. These suggestive tales made me very curious.

My first excursion --- and my last, thank God! --- into those hills occurred while Constantine Theunis and I were living in Hampdon the summer of 1938. He was writing a treatise on Egyptian mythology, and I found myself alone much of the time, despite the fact that we shared a modest cabin on Beacon Street, within sight of the infamous Pirate House, built by Exer Jones over sixty years ago.

The morning of June 23rd found me walking in those oddly-shaped hills, which had, since seven o'clock, seemed very ordinary indeed. I must have been about seven miles south of Hampdon before I noticed anything unusual. I was climbing a grassy ridge overlooking a particularly deep canyon, when I came upon an area totally devoid of the usual bunch-grass and greaseweed. It extended southward, over numerous hills and valleys. At first I thought the spot had been burned over the previous fall, but upon examining the turf, I found no signs of a blaze. The nearby slopes and ravines looked terribly scarred and seared, as if some gigantic torch had blasted them, wiping away all vegetation. And yet there was no evidence of fire. . . .

I moved on over rich, black soil in which no grass flourished. As I headed for the approximate center of this desolate area, I began to notice a strange silence. There were no larks, no rabbits, and even the insects seemed to have deserted the place. I gained the summit of a lofty knoll and tried to guess at the size of that bleak, inexplicable region. Then I saw the lone tree.

It stood on a hill somewhat higher than its companions, and attracted the eye because it was so utterly unexpected. I had seen no trees for miles: thorn and hackberry bushes clustered the shallower ravines, but there had been no mature trees. Strange to find one standing on the crest of a hill.

I crossed two steep canyons before I came to it; and a surprise awaited me. It was not a pine tree, nor a fir tree, nor a hackberry tree. I had never, in all my life, seen one to compare with it---and I never have to this day, for which I am eternally

thankful!

More than anything it resembled an oak. It had a huge, twisted trunk, fully a yard in diameter, and the large limbs began spreading outward scarcely seven feet from the ground. The leaves were round, and curiously alike in size and design. It might have been a tree painted on a canvas, but I will swear that it was real. I shall always know that it was real, despite what Theunis said later.

I recall that I glanced at the sun and judged the time to be about 10 o'clock a. m., although I did not look at my watch. The day was becoming warm, and I sat for a while in the welcome shade of the huge tree. Then I regarded the rank grass that flourished beneath it--another singular phenomenon when I remembered the bleak terrain through which I had passed. A wild maze of hills, ravines and bluffs hemmed me in on all sides, although the rise on which I sat was rather higher than any other within miles. I looked far to the east--and I jumped to my feet, startled and amazed. Shimmering through a blue haze of distance were the Bitterroot Mountains! There is no other range of snow-capped peaks within three hundred miles of Hampden; and I knew--at this altitude--that I shouldn't be seeing them at all. For several minutes I gazed at the marvel; then I became drowsy. I lay in the rank grass, beneath the tree. I unstrapped my camera, took off my hat, and relaxed, staring skyward through the green leaves. I closed my eyes.

Then a curious phenomenon began to assail me--a vague, cloudy sort of vision--glimpsing or day-dreaming seemingly without relevance to anything familiar. I thought I saw a great temple by a sea of ooze, where three suns gleamed in a pale red sky. The vast tomb, or temple, was an anomalous color--a nameless blue-violet shade. Large beasts flew in the cloudy sky, and I seemed to hear the pounding of their scaly wings. I went nearer the stone temple, and a huge doorway loomed in front of me. Within that portal were swirling shadows that seemed to dart and leer and try to snatch me inside that awful darkness. I thought I saw three flaming eyes in the shifting void of a doorway, and I screamed with mortal fear. In that noisome depth, I knew, lurked utter destruction--a living hell even worse than death. I screamed again. The vision faded.

I saw the round leaves and the same earthly sky. I struggled to rise. I was trembling; cold perspiration beaded my brow. I had a mad impulse to flee; run insanely from that sinister tree on the hill--but I checked the absurd intuition and sat down, trying to collect my senses. Never had I dreamed anything so realistic; so horrifying. What had caused the vision? I had been reading several of Theunis' tomes on ancient Egypt. . . . I mopped my forehead, and decided that it was time for lunch. But I did not feel like eating.

Then I had an inspiration. I would take a few snapshots of the tree, for Theunis. They might shock him out of his habitual air of unconcern. Perhaps I would tell him about the dream. . . . Opening my camera, I took half a dozen shots of the tree, and every aspect of the landscape as seen from the tree. Also, I included one of the gleaming, snow-crested peaks. I might want to return, and these photos would help. . . .

Folding the camera, I returned to my cushion of soft grass. Had that spot beneath the tree a certain alien enchantment? I know that I was reluctant to leave it. . . .



I gazed upward at the curious round leaves. I closed my eyes. A breeze stirred the branches, and their whispered music lulled me into tranquil oblivion. And suddenly I saw again the pale red sky and the three suns. The land of three shadows! Again the great temple came into view. I seemed to be floating on the air---a disembodied spirit exploring the wonders of a mad, multi-dimensional world! The temple's oddly-angled cornices frightened me, and I knew that this place was one that no man on earth had ever seen in his wildest dreams.

Again the vast doorway yawned before me; and I was sucked within that black, writhing cloud. I seemed to be staring at space unlimited. I saw a void beyond my vocabulary to describe; a dark, bottomless gulf teeming with nameless shapes and entities---things of madness and delirium, as tenuous as a mist from Shamballah.

My soul shrank. I was terribly afraid. I screamed and screamed, and felt that I would soon go mad. Then in my dream I ran and ran in a fever of utter terror, but I did not know what I was running from. . . . I left that hideous temple and that hellish void, yet I knew I must, barring some miracle, return. . . .

At last my eyes flew open. I was not beneath the tree. I was sprawled on a rocky slope, my clothing torn and disordered. My hands were bleeding. I stood up, pain stabbing through me. I recognized the spot---the ridge where I had first seen the blasted area! I must have walked miles---unconscious! The tree was not in sight, and I was glad. . . . Even the knees of my trousers were torn, as if I had crawled part of the way. . . .

I glanced at the sun. Late afternoon! Where had I been? I snatched out my watch. It had stopped at 10:34. . . .

## II

"So you have the snapshots?" Theunis drawled. I met his gray eyes across the breakfast table. Three days had slipped by since my return from Hell's Acres. I had told him about the dream beneath the tree, and he had laughed.

"Yes," I replied. "They came last night. Haven't had a chance to open them yet. Give 'em a good, careful study---if they aren't all failures. Perhaps you'll change your mind."

Theunis smiled; sipped his coffee. I gave him the unopened envelope and he quickly broke the seal and withdrew the pictures. He glanced at the first one, and the smile faded from his leonine face. He crushed out his cigarette.

"My God, man! Look at this!"

I seized the glossy rectangle. It was the first picture of the tree, taken at a distance of fifty feet or so. The cause of Theunis' excitement escaped me. There it was, standing boldly on the hill, while below it grew the jungle of grass where I had lain. In the distance were my snow-capped mountains!

"There you are," I cried. "The proof of my story----"

"Look at it!" Theunis snapped. "The shadows---there are three for every rock, bush and tree!"

He was right. . . . Below the tree, spread in fanlike incongruity, lay three overlapping shadows. Suddenly I realized that the picture held an abnormal and inconsistent element. The leaves on the thing were too lush for the work of sane nature, while the trunk was bulged and knotted in the most abhorrent shapes. Theunis

dropped the picture on the table.

"There is something wrong," I muttered. "The tree I saw didn't look as repulsive as that----"

"Are you sure?" Theunis grated. "The fact is, you may have seen many things not recorded on this film."

"It shows more than I saw!"

"That's the point. There is something damnably out of place in this landscape; something I can't understand. The tree seems to suggest a thought---beyond my grasp. . . . It is too misty; too uncertain; too unreal to be natural!" He rapped nervous fingers on the table. He snatched the remaining films and shuffled through them, rapidly.

I reached for the snapshot he had dropped, and sensed a touch of bizarre uncertainty and strangeness as my eyes absorbed its every detail. The flowers and weeds pointed at varying angles, while some of the grass grew in the most bewildering fashion. The tree seemed too veiled and clouded to be readily distinguished, but I noted the huge limbs and the half-bent flower stems that were ready to fall over, yet did not fall. And the many, overlapping shadows. . . . They were, altogether, very disquieting shadows---too long or short when compared to the stems they fell below to give one a feeling of comfortable normality. The landscape hadn't shocked me the day of my visit. . . . There was a dark familiarity and mocking suggestion in it; something tangible, yet distant as the stars beyond the galaxy.

Theunis came back to earth. "Did you mention three suns in your dreaming orgy?"

I nodded, frankly puzzled. Then it dawned on me. My fingers trembled slightly as I stared at the picture again. My dream! Of course----

"The others are just like it," Theunis said. "That same uncertainty; that suggestion. I should be able to catch the mood of the thing; see it in its real light, but it is too. . . . Perhaps later I shall find out, if I look at it long enough."

We sat in silence for some time. A thought came to me, suddenly, prompted by a strange, inexplicable longing to visit the tree again. "Let's make an excursion. I think I can take you there in half a day."

"You'd better stay away," replied Theunis, thoughtfully. "I doubt if you could find the place again if you wanted to."

"Nonsense," I replied. "Surely, with these photos to guide us----"

"Did you see any familiar landmarks in them?"

His observation was uncanny. After looking through the remaining snaps carefully, I had to admit that there were none.

Theunis muttered under his breath and drew viciously on his cigarette. "A perfectly normal---or nearly so---picture of a spot apparently dropped from nowhere. Seeing mountains at this low altitude is preposterous. . . . but wait!"

He sprang from the chair as a hunted animal and raced from the room. I could hear him moving about in our makeshift library, cursing volubly. Before long he reappeared with an old, leather-bound volume. Theunis opened it reverently, and pored over the odd characters.

"What do you call that?" I inquired.

"This is an early English translation of the Chronicle of



Nath, written by Rudolf Yergler, a German mystic and alchemist who borrowed some of his lore from Hermes Trismegistus, the ancient Egyptian sorcerer. There is a passage here that might interest you ---might make you understand why this business is even further from the natural than you suspect. Listen."

"So in the year of the Black Goat there came unto Nath a shadow that should not be on Earth, and that had no form known to the eyes of Earth. And it fed on the souls of men; they that it gnawed being lured and blinded with dreams till the horror and the endless night lay upon them. Nor did they see that which gnawed them; for the shadow took false shapes that men know or dream of, and only freedom seemed waiting in the Land of the Three Suns. But it was told by priests of the Old Book that he who could see the shadow's true shape, and live after the seeing, might shun its doom and send it back to the starless gulf of its spawning. This none could do save through the Gem; wherefore did Ka-Wefer the High-Priest keep that gem sacred in the temple. And when it was lost with Phrenes, he who braved the horror and was never seen more, there was weeping in Nath. Yet did the Shadow depart sated at last, nor shall it hunger again till the cycles roll back to the year of the Black Goat."

Theunis paused while I stared, bewildered. Finally he spoke. "Now, Single, I suppose you can guess how all this links up. There is no need of going deep into the primal lore behind this business, but I may as well tell you that according to the old legends this is the so-called 'Year of the Black Goat'---when certain horrors from the fathomless Outside are supposed to visit the earth and do infinite harm. We don't know how they'll be manifest, but there's reason to think that strange mirages and hallucinations will be mixed up in the matter. I don't like the thing you've run up against---the story or the pictures. It may be pretty bad, and I warn you to look out. But first I must try to do what old Yergler says--to see if I can glimpse the matter as it is. Fortunately the old Gem he mentions has been rediscovered---I know where I can get at it. We must use it on the photographs and see what we see.

"It's more or less like a lens or prism, though one can't take photographs with it. Someone of peculiar sensitiveness might look through and sketch what he sees. There's a bit of danger, and the looker may have his consciousness shaken a trifle; for the real shape of the shadow isn't pleasant and doesn't belong on this earth. But it would be a lot more dangerous not to do anything about it. Meanwhile, if you value your life and sanity, keep away from that hill---and from the thing you think is a tree on it!"

I was more bewildered than ever. "How can there be organized beings from the Outside in our midst?" I cried. "How do we know that such things exist?"

"You reason in terms of this tiny earth," Theunis said. "Surely you don't think that the world is a rule for measuring the universe. There are entities we never dream of floating under our very noses. Modern science is thrusting back the borderland of the unknown and proving that the mystics were not so far off the track----"



Suddenly I knew that I did not want to look at the picture again; I wanted to destroy it. I wanted to run from it. Theunis was suggesting something beyond. . . . A trembling, cosmic fear gripped me and drew me away from the hideous picture, for I was afraid I would recognize some object in it. . . .

I glanced at my friend. He was poring over the ancient book, a strange expression on his face. He sat up straight. "Let's call the thing off for today. I'm tired of this endless guessing and wondering. I must get the loan of the gem from the museum where it is, and do what is to be done."

"As you say," I replied. "Will you have to go to Croydon?"

He nodded.

"Then we'll both go home," I said decisively.

### III

I need not chronicle the events of the fortnight that followed. With me they formed a constant and enervating struggle between a mad longing to return to the cryptic tree of dreams and freedom, and a frenzied dread of that selfsame thing and all connected with it. That I did not return is perhaps less a matter of my own will than a matter of pure chance. Meanwhile I knew that Theunis was desperately active in some investigation of the strangest nature---something which included a mysterious motor trip and a return under circumstances of the greatest secrecy. By hints over the telephone I was made to understand that he had somewhere borrowed the obscure and primal object mentioned in the ancient volume as "The Gem," and that he was busy devising a means of applying it to the photographs I had left with him. He spoke fragmentarily of "refraction," "polarization," and "unknown angles of space and time," and indicated that he was building a kind of box or camera obscura for the study of the curious snapshots with the gem's aid.

It was on the sixteenth day that I received the startling message from the hospital in Croydon. Theunis was there, and wanted to see me at once. He had suffered some odd sort of seizure; being found prone and unconscious by friends who found their way into his house after hearing certain cries of mortal agony and fear. Though still weak and helpless, he had now regained his senses and seemed frantic to tell me something and have me perform certain important duties. This much the hospital informed me over the wire; and within half an hour I was at my friend's bedside, marvelling at the inroads which worry and tension had made on his features in so brief a time. His first act was to move away the nurses in order to speak in utter confidence.

"Single---I saw it!" His voice was strained and husky. "You must destroy them all---those pictures. I sent it back by seeing it, but the pictures had better go. That tree will never be seen on the hill again---at least, I hope not---till thousands of eons bring back the Year of The Black Goat. You are safe now---mankind is safe." He paused, breathing heavily, and continued.

"Take the Gem out of the apparatus and put it in the safe---you know the combination. It must go back where it came from, for there's a time when it may be needed to save the world. They won't let me leave here yet, but I can rest if I know it's safe. Don't look through the box as it is---it would fix you as it's fixed me.

And burn those damned photographs . . . the one in the box and the others. . . ." But Theunis was exhausted now, and the nurses advanced and motioned me away as he leaned back and closed his eyes.

In another half-hour I was at his house and looking curiously at the long black box on the library table beside the overturned chair. Scattered papers blew about in a breeze from the open window and close to the box I recognized with a queer sensation the envelope of pictures I had taken. It required only a moment for me to examine the box and detach at one end my earliest picture of the tree, and at the other end a strange bit of amber-colored crystal, cut in devious angles impossible to classify. The touch of the glass fragment seemed curiously warm and electric, and I could scarcely bear to put it out of sight in Theunis' wall safe. The snapshot I handled with a disconcerting mixture of emotions. Even after I had replaced it in the envelope with the rest I had a morbid longing to save it and gloat over it and rush out and up the hill toward its original. Peculiar line-arrangements sprang out of its details to assault and puzzle my memory . . . pictures behind pictures . . . secrets lurking in half-familiar shapes: . . . But a saner contrary instinct, operating at the same time, gave me the vigor and avidity of unplaceable fear as I hastily kindled a fire in the grate and watched the problematic envelope burn to ashes. Somehow I felt that the earth had been purged of a horror on whose brink I had trembled, and which was none the less monstrous because I did not know what it was.

Of the source of Theunis' terrific shock I could form no coherent guess, nor did I dare to think too closely about it. It is notable that I did not at any time have the least impulse to look through the box before removing the gem and photograph. What was shown in the picture by the antique crystal's lens or prism-like power was not, I felt curiously certain, anything that a normal brain ought to be called upon to face. Whatever it was, I had myself been close to it---had been completely under the spell of its allurements---as it brooded on that remote hill in the form of a tree and an unfamiliar landscape. And I did not wish to know what I had so narrowly escaped.

Would that my ignorance might have remained complete! I could sleep better at night. As it was, my eye was arrested before I left the room by the pile of scattered papers rustling on the table beside the black box. All but one were blank, but that one bore a crude drawing in pencil. Suddenly recalling what Theunis had once said about sketching the horror revealed by the gem, I strove to turn away; but sheer curiosity defeated my sane design. Looking again almost furtively, I observed the nervous haste of the strokes, and the unfinished edge left by the sketcher's terrified seizure. Then, in a burst of perverse boldness, I looked squarely at the dark and forbidden design---and fell in a faint.

I shall never describe fully what I saw. After a time I regained my senses, thrust the sheet into the dying fire, and staggered out through the quiet streets to my home. I thanked God that I had not looked through the crystal at the photograph, and prayed fervently that I might forget the drawing's terrible hint of what Theunis had beheld. Since then I have never been quite the same. Even the fairest scenes have seemed to hold some vague, ambiguous hint of the nameless blasphemies which may underlie them and form their masquerading essence. And yet the sketch was so slight---so



little indicative of all that Theunis, to judge from his guarded accounts later on, must have discerned!

Only a few basic elements of the landscape were in the thing. For the most part a cloudy, exotic-looking vapor dominated the view. Every object that might have been familiar was seen to be part of something vague and unknown and altogether un-terrestrial ---something infinitely vaster than any human eye could grasp, and infinitely alien, monstrous, and hideous as guessed from the fragment within range.

Where I had, in the landscape itself, seen the twisted, half-sentient tree, there was here visible only a gnarled, terrible hand or talon with fingers or feelers shockingly distended and evidently groping toward something on the ground or in the spectator's direction. And squarely below the writhing, bloated digits I thought I saw an outline in the grass where a man had lain. But the sketch was hasty, and I could not be sure.

THE END

## EDITORIAL ILLUMINATION

(continued from Page 3)

take advantage of the six months before it appears to procure the very best material available, and to present it in the most attractive manner possible.

As we stated in our last issue, we are now presenting as an experiment a long fantasy, occupying nearly eight pages. Whether we will repeat this in the future or confine ourselves to a larger number of shorter stories rests with you, the readers. Please vote on this matter when you write. And also, please rate each story by number, just as you do for Spaceways. If we get sufficient cooperation from you we will present average ratings both for this issue and for #3 in our next number.

Another result of the early issuance of this magazine is a vast uncertainty about our address. Probably about August 15, when some of you will be getting this, we will be at Box 234, Payette, Idaho, as given at the head of the contents page. On the other hand, we may not. At any rate, any comments sent there will be forwarded. Then about September 15 we will be returning to Pasadena, California -- but whether we'll be at 404 S. Lake Ave. again or not, we know not. But, once more, if you write us there after September 15, the mail will be forwarded to us. This is undoubtedly very confusing to you--but you can't be half as confused about the whole thing as we are. If we are fortunate enough to get to the Chicon (and we sincerely hope that we will be), we'll explain the matter to each and every one of you personally. So see--now you'll have to come to the Chicon! But whether we see you there or not, write to one address or the other--the letter will reach us.

So we'll close this issue (and with it the first year of Polaris) with a word of thanks to all of you for your kindness to our little venture; to our contributors, without whose help this magazine would have been impossible; and above all, to the Los Angeles boys and gals for their enthusiastic cooperation in helping to put out the magazine.



## YGDASIL

*by John F Burke*

Roland Prentiss had always longed to visit Norway. He would spend odd moments in the Reference Library, reading books on Norse legend, and looking through the photographs in travel pamphlets with wistful eyes. He found it hard to explain to himself why Scandinavia should have such an appeal, but within him he always felt that urge to explore the grim, mountainous country of the North - an urge that led him nowhere, since he had not the money to make the trip. He saved about two shillings a week, which was not much of a help; sometimes he would find his shoes needed mending, and then he would draw from that two shillings....

Prentiss was twenty-seven when the War broke out.

From a rather uneventful life, shared between the dull, monotonous reality of the dingy insurance office and the fantastic dreams of the Library, he was plunged into this strange new world that was apparently going topsy-turvy. He volunteered rather than wait to be conscripted, although there was a singular lack of any anxiety to fight for his country. All about him people mouthed patriotic slogans, but he was not one of that class - in the back of his mind he felt that he wanted to visit Norway. Maybe he would manage, if he came through this alive.

He found himself in Norway sooner than he expected, but the conditions were not those in which he had contemplated visiting the country. Before he had much chance to look around his right leg was shattered pretty thoroughly, and he was moved into an improvised hospital in an old barn. They gave him attention, and shook their heads.

"I suppose I'm finished?" said Prentiss, watching them calmly, and then looking over their heads to the white patch of light that was the door, with mountains framed in its opening. Those mountains seemed to dominate him, and, unconscious of the fact that he was muttering feverishly, he strained to reach them.

He could not quite work out how he came to be on the large plain. He looked about him. His memory of what had happened since he left the hospital - for he obviously must have left it, or he would not be here - was hazy. He had an idea that this was a plateau, not a plain. It was rather surprising. He looked all around at the barren waste; not a plant on it -

"That's funny", he said.

He turned round as a rustling sound came to his ears, and found a large tree close to him. That tree certainly had not been there a few minutes ago.

"Are you coming to the top?" said a voice from the uppermost branches.

Prentiss stood back a little, but he could see no-one. Why should he climb the tree - how could he, with his injured leg? Or, rather, without his leg. The tree looked curious - he could not see whether the top branches were far from the ground or not. They stretched up forever, holding up the vault of the sky, and yet they were close to him; he could touch them if he wished. They swept about the trunk, where it plunged into the ground, but they stood up proudly, reaching out for miles, shading the whole earth, taking

their nourishment from the ground, and looked over all mankind....

Ygdrasil, the Tree of Life!

Roland Prentiss heard the phrase in his mind. He remembered the stories of Wotan, greatest of gods, the mighty All-Father, who could see all over the earth from the top of Ygdrasil.

"But that's ridiculous", said Prentiss. "The earth is round, so even if he had good eyesight he couldn't see round corners and right round the earth".

He looked down into the green leaves of the tree, and it then occurred to him to wonder how he had been transported to the top of the tree, when only a moment ago he had been on the ground. He had no recollection of climbing up. There was no sense of discomfort - the branches of the tree were buoyant, soft, like an armchair.

"Welcome", said a very deep voice.

Prentiss turned round easily enough, and faced a figure, one strange yet familiar. Somewhere before Prentiss had seen that curious hat, pulled well down over one eye, seen the flash and unearthly wisdom in the other, seen the two hawks, one perched gravely on each shoulder.

The man lifted his head suddenly, and the light shone upon where the other eye should have been - but there was none there.

Then Prentiss knew, and, knowing, disbelieved. This was impossible. Wotan was but a myth.....

"Now that you have been lifted to the top of Ygdrasil", said the man in a voice that boomed and sang with incredible richness, setting each delicate leaf on the Tree of Life a-quiver, so that all hummed a gentle, yet barbaric strain, "what would you see?"

"Is that war still going on?" asked Prentiss, not sounding nearly as dumbfounded as he felt.

"Yes", said the All-Father; "there is rejoicing in Valhalla as the heroes come pouring in, over the rainbow bridge and through the gates".

He looked down, and, following his gaze, Roland Prentiss saw the white fleecy clouds below swirling aside. There came to his eyes a picture that seemed almost real - it was real! He was looking down on a scene of battle, and mingled with the explosions of heavy shells came subdued cheering, and the sound of strong voices lifted in song - but the noise came not from the battlefield.

"The dead are being welcomed into the halls of Valhalla", said Wotan. "Watch this!"

He pointed. The clouds moved slightly, and on the scarred ground appeared a building, with a tiny, miniature vehicle drawn up by it. There was a haze about the roof, but even so it looked very familiar to Prentiss, and in a moment he recognised it as the barn in which the hospital had been set up. In the swirling haze were things moving...things indistinguishable, that writhed and contorted in the veil of mist. Suddenly a black shadow flitted across the barn, something black dropped, and there was an explosion.

"They can't do that!" said Prentiss angrily. "They've bombed a hospital".

Wotan shrugged his shoulders, causing the hawks to stir uneasily. One of them made a rasping noise that sounded like a laugh. Roland Prentiss was about to make a comment when he noticed what was happening in the pall of smoke that arose from the stricken hospital below. Curious things were plunging into that smoke; things that looked like birds, yet that were not birds, but, in-



credibly, strange woman-shapes with wings.

"What the devil....?"

"The Valkyrie", said Wotan, watching the darting shapes with a fond gleam in his eye. "They choose the dead from the battlefield, and decide who shall have a place of honour in Valhalla. Watch!"

Fascinated, Prentiss watched as the angels of death swooped down into the smoke, their bodies straight and slim, their pinions beating fiercely against the air. Those shapes went diving, twisting down into the haze, and then came up again, each bearing a shattered body.

"Can we see them closer?" he asked suddenly, not knowing why he should be anxious to see the gruesome remains at close quarters, but impelled to enquire by some force within himself that was not of himself.

In a moment the scene changed, becoming amazingly large, as though a huge telescope had been extended.

Prentiss shrank back instinctively, so huge and realistic did it seem. He was looking into the unbelievably beautiful face of a Valkyrie, stern but glorious, with tresses of wind-whipped hair streaming from her head or falling in confusion about her breast, to which she clasped a man, torn and bloody. As she rose he looked down at the man's face, and screamed.

"That's impossible!" he cried. "That's me - and I'm here - I'm alive; it can't be me!"

"No, of course not", said Wotan, but his voice was different, more human, and when Prentiss opened his eyes he saw the doctor leaning over him.

"I'm alive, aren't I?" he gasped, clutching the edge of the sheet, which was almost torn to ribbons. "I can't be dead".

"Of course you can't", said the doctor. "You shouldn't worry about dreams. You're alive, and you'll be alive for a long time yet".

In this he lied; scarcely a second after he had finished speaking a bomb hit the hospital, which went aloft in a fountain of smoke and splinters.

Two soldiers nearby hauled themselves out of the ditch into which they had been hurled by the force of the explosion, and looked at the heavy pall of smoke grimly.

"Of all the lousy things to do", said one; "comin' over here to bomb our hospitals, just for spite".

But the other ignored him. He gazed in rapt wonder at the smoke, blinking rather foolishly, and emitting a slight whistle from his mouth. Later, when he told what he had seen, his comrades were not ribald - too many curious things were seen in the days of war to be incredulous and scornful - but they did not really believe what they heard.

It did seem a little far-fetched to imagine a winged woman rising from the wreckage with a man in her arms.

THE END

Read Snide

The Thud and Blunder Magazine

Damon Knight

803 Columbia Street

Hood River, Oregon



# DREAM

*by Damon Knight*

In the dawn-time, when those who dwelt upon the Earth were something less and something more than men, I lived in a city called Argo, in the kingdom of Eysheth. In that city I was as men are, save that my soul stayed not in one body, but wandered from one to the other, rich and poor alike.

So it was in the dawn-time: to the city of Argo came one day three Orientals, with blandly-smiling faces and gloves upon their hands. In the street called L'unen they bought stalls in the marketplace and set themselves up as merchants. And although they grew very prosperous, it was observed that never did they wear robes of the green cloth cleiya, which was the usual garb of rich merchants, but dressed always in garments of gold and silver. And it was further noticed that while they dealt not only in precious stones and rare carvings from the Orient, but in other goods also, even in food and wine, no green fruits or vegetables could be bought of them; only the purple grape, and scarlet karaberry, and the black seed of the louka vine, which blooms at midnight. And so it came to be whispered that the Orientals were too noble to deal in goods having other than royal colors, and their trade prospered accordingly.

But one day it chanced that the Emperor, having occasion to pass through the city, observed with displeasure that no green flag of loyalty flew from the abode of the three; and he ordered that they should be seized and carried to his throne on the banks of the Eis, for judgement.

Lo! so it was in the dawn-time; the officer in charge of their seizure was a man but recently come to Argo; and that man was I.

And when I looked upon the faces of the three, memory stirred within me, and I cried out, "Are you not they who were driven out from the city of Anustaj, with green upon your hands?" and the three only smiled and bowed, and answered nothing.

Then I cried, in a louder voice, "Was not your dwelling in Anusgaj yellow-painted when you came, and was it not colored a dank and horrible green when you left it?" And still they made no answer.

Then I cried "Does not every green thing that you touch leave upon you a dank stain that will not go away? And is not your doom to become like unto walking images of Lyeshu, so that all men shun you? And are you not accursed of the Green God?"

And still the three answered not.

Then I said "If these things be so, it is your aim to defeat the cruse of Lyeshu by death at the hands of the Emperor. Therefore, I shall not take you to him." And I folded my arms.

Then stepped forward the three as one, and the first spoke and said "You have guessed well." And the second suddenly removed his glove and clasped my hand in his, so that the nauseous green of it ran onto mine, saying "The blessings of the Green God upon you!" Then, as my body sank senseless to the floor, did the third turn to those who had been in my command, and say "Take us away."

(continued on Page 19)

# THE ARTIZAN'S REWARD

*by R H Barlow*

"Since each of us has gold, and twenty years to shape it", remarked the sculptor to his rival, "our king's reign will be remembered, and one of us."

He wished them to make a god out of the coin purveyed from a city lately conquered, for in that city were unendurably find gods who perhaps only in sleeping had permitted its fall.

Of these craftsmen one polished his chisel eight years and went to Assyria to look at a certain frieze, and enquired into all subjects pertaining to the gods and their symbols.

He learned a little pondering the nine thousand volumes which in his land dealt with them. Some, it appeared, were possessed of twelve legs, and others of none at all. Some were female and some male, but most were more complicated. In a heathen land where the women braided flowers in their hair and no one worked, there was a god who had come riding a meteor as one rides a white-maned horse rapidly through the dusk. In a cold land there was a god with but one attribute. In a land of interlinking lakes whose people had never built a house but lived in skiffs and wore lilypads when it rained, the god was named Drought. In a dark land prisoned between two mountains bearing the same name, there was a god with a burning, inextinguishable beard. In yet another land all the gods had been broken across by a man with bright eyes, and for this his fellows worshipped him.

These things he found written, and afterward spent twelve years in hammering models out of lead.

But his rival lay on a hillside whose grass the sheep envied over low fences, and made up fables which he knew to be untrue about a star habitually blooming near one tree, or frightened pigeons at sunset where the river had sought to come ashore and even kept a garrison of reeds. Moreover, when the torches of the sunset and the stars and the young year were alike burnt out, he found them kindled anew in little jugs of wine as delightful on the lip as even a woman's lip.

The first sculptor wore a black gown and regularly went to bed, for he was very earnest in his wish to make an admirable statue.

The second wore a robe of any colour he fancied, even though full of holes.

And so time carried off twenty hampers of years each brimming with corroded or bright coins which people had put into them, and which were the more plentiful I need not say.

Then before him the king, no longer given to riding abroad as victor, called the two sculptors.

"I gave you gold to play with two decades long" he said, "and what will you give me back?"

A man in a black robe signalled his apprentices to wheel in a veiled god, and when the veil was removed, all looked. Neither head nor arms did the god have, and much of the rest was lead not yet covered with gold. And he asked another twenty years of the king.

Then the king asked him of the piebald robe, who was teasing

the palace cat with a petunia-stalk.

He said "I have wasted your gold and my days and have only this which I did last night when a dream woke me up."

From the second statue a second cloth was taken, and the god was as a god should be.

The company wept and the king lay for an hour on his face thinking of something he had done when only a boy and not really to be blamed.

The sculptor of the black robe went up to the god with a tape-measure.

Then as a reward the king gave his cat to the man, for the man had asked it of him, and appointed a priest to the statue.

And the bad statue was melted into a base for the other, though friends of the man who made it brought humbly a petition to the king.

For seven hundred years the figure endured at that court until its feet were worn away with kisses, and even now in eastern countries men exchange the coins into which on the capture of the city, it was cast.

THE END

## THE SINGLE STRAIN

*by Jack Chapman Miske*

George Milton had long been a poet; but great music was comparatively new to him. He liked themes, recurring melodies, and said he couldn't really listen to classical music, because it wandered. When he was about nineteen, though, he began to discover occasional classical pieces which opened whole new vistas of dream to him. Much as with his appreciation of poetry, he refused to be guided by critics, or awed by great names. He laughed at some compositions I had always taken for granted were great, while he listened enraptured to "minor" pieces.

He never attended concerts, but very often he and I would listen alone to records until the dark, silent hours of the night. It was one of those times that it happened.

We had heard a number of his favorites, and I thought to play something new to him. Consequently I put on Tchaikowsky's Fifth. As perhaps you are aware, while the Fifth is a well-known symphony, the so-called authorities are accustomed to say it is sentimental and grossly overrated -- as, indeed, they say of all Tchaikowsky's work. I like it, however, and felt Milton would also.

He listened closely to the first movement, and upon its conclusion turned to me a bit wistfully and spoke.

"There is an undercurrent, a hinting, at something greater running through it," he said. "But the composer failed to catch the real melody, if I can call it that. He is like me, I fear." He smiled thinly. "He grasps always for something that his mind knows, feels, perfectly, but whose capture is impossible, whose entirety eludes him always. You see, Jack, in one's mind it exists



as a shadow. To capture it on paper would give it substance, would breathe into it a glowing, vibrant life the mind alone cannot conceive. But even while we seek that ultimate beauty, we know our task is an impossible one. You see the paradox -- life is meaningless, for we know we cannot reach our goal -- yet we insist on giving existence a meaning for as long as the search is possible to us.

"We weave for ever our little dreams, and build our unsubstantial worlds, but the material we use is dust. And we know it. The spectre of reality always looms over and greater in our minds. Reality is cruel; on human standards, at least. And you and I, Jack -- we are human. A faith in ourselves and our futile, meaningless scribblings -- that is all there is, all there can be.

"There is more to it?" he asked.

"Yes, of course."

I arose and put on the second movement. It started, and almost immediately Milton amazed me by leaping upright in his chair.

"Jack! You heard that?"

I nodded, bewildered. "Of course. I've heard it many times." And then I added inanely. "Pretty, isn't it?"

"Pretty? Pretty? He...he almost caught it!" And then Milton said simply, "How close he must have been. How very close."

"Play it again," he commanded. "Put it back to the beginning, I mean."

And I did, and he listened.

"What wonderful beauty." He was speechless for a moment as it ended. "You heard it -- that recurring, questing strain? He couldn't finish even it, that single strain, so elusive is the beauty. As it is now, it's like a thought unfinished, like an unrhymed couplet. It--it should end like this." And then he hummed the chord again, adding to it a few more notes, instead of continuing into the main theme. It was strangely beautiful.

Then, all at once, Milton was on his feet, pacing the floor madly, words tumbling from his mouth in a rushing torrent.

"That is beauty. It isn't of this world. It's bigger. It's of the Universe, the stars and the deeps of space. It's living and dying, and more. So much more, transcending for a moment the bounds of Earth. It's the pulse of Chaos that beats in every inch of the universe; it's the sum of matter and death and all there is or ever will be.

"Even when I think of it, I feel my mind becoming too large for my body, too big for this tiny world. It soars to beyond the stars and above them, yet I feel restricted, hampered and bound on every side by intangible bounds. I want to stand above the burning stars, and in my love of beauty tear the wheeling worlds from place."

He stopped then and looked at me. "I'm sorry," he said. There was silence for a few moments, for I could think of nothing to say. Then he spoke again. "Do you mind if I leave you now? There is something I must write tonight."

And quickly he left.

THE END

Read the English fan magazines.

# THE QUESTIONER

19

*by R H Barlow*

Crowned with Sirius Night sat broodingly in a grove. Her lips were laden with secrets: with a song once uttered by Vikings at a campfire whose perishing would be the signal to harry Christian towns asleep nearby; with words a prince of India had said to his love when her mouth would let him speak; with groans unuttered but thought of by sick men and feverish; with words caught up from children's lips as they dreamed.

Of these things Night spoke not, but sat there receiving homage of the trees which in her honour wore garments they show not to men. And for awhile she thought little of Dawn who yesterday and for a thousand years had overthrown her, coming through a land hidden by the mountains; though in six hours he would step over them.

Then a poet who had loved the colour of her robes came questioning. "I would know most truthfully," he said, "from you who are guardian of ultimate truths, if they speak right who call you Queller of Unrest. A bird of yours shrieked it to me once, and I saw it written by moonlight on sand at a lake's margin, but since I have lived I mistrust. I would know if you will quench in time those fires consuming and reconsuming my heart; if you will feed them eventually ashes so that snarling of hunger they will die; if you will slay utterly several hours which lie bleeding within me; if to your populous city a man may come and be equal in grandeur with the Pharaohs, in wisdom with the two Florentines, in content with whosoever has possessed content."

Without looking at him she pointed her prodigious hand to a star no longer dwelt in, where graves had lain ruined and peaceful a thousand long years.

THE END  
- - - -

## DREAM

by Damon Knight

(continued from Page 15)

At this the soul of my body departed, and went into the body of the Emperor's son, on the banks of the Eis. And presently I saw approaching the throne the barge carrying the three Orientals and their guards and oarsmen, and I watched it anxiously, for it seemed to me that the green water of the lake was eating away the barge's side, making it sink swiftly lower in the water; for now there was in me no memory of the officer whom I had been.

Yet after the crystal green waters had closed over the heads of the three smiling Orientals and their guards and oarsmen, I remembered nothing, for it was not in the brain of my new abode long to remember any matter; for which reason I continued my drinking.

THE END  
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