

**THE BEST WEBZINE FOR SCI-FI, FANTASY, AND HORROR!**

# Schlock!

**WEBZINE**

VOL. 14, ISSUE 12  
24TH FEBRUARY 2019

**THE  
LEPRECHAUN'S  
RAINBOW**

BY AARON PFAU  
"YOU WON'T  
FORGET ABOUT  
ME POT OF GOLD,  
WILL YOU?"

**MONKEYFICATION  
BY CHRISTOPHER  
T DABROWSKI**

**ZED**

BY STE  
WHITEHOUSE  
ZOMBIE  
RETRO  
VIRUS...

**WHITE DEW  
ROB BLISS**

[WWW.SCHLOCK.CO.UK](http://WWW.SCHLOCK.CO.UK)

SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

Edited by  
Gavin Chappell

PUBLISHED BY:  
Schlock! Publications  
([www.schlock.co.uk](http://www.schlock.co.uk))

Schlock! Webzine

*Copyright © 2018 by Gavin Chappell, C Priest Brumley, Steven Havelock, Christopher T Dabrowski., Ste Whitehouse, Aaron Pfau, Gregory KH Bryant, Rob Bliss, H Rider Haggard, A Merritt*

## SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

Welcome to Schlock! the webzine for science fiction, fantasy, and horror.

Vol. 14, Issue 12  
24<sup>th</sup> February 2019

Schlock! is a weekly webzine dedicated to short stories, flash fiction, serialised novels, and novellas, within the genres of science fiction, fantasy, and horror. We publish new and old works of pulp sword and sorcery, urban fantasy, dark fantasy, and gothic horror. If you want to read quality works of new pulp fantasy, science fiction or horror, Schlock! is the webzine for you!

For details of previous editions, please go to the [website](#).

Schlock! Webzine is always willing to consider new science fiction, fantasy and horror short stories, serials, graphic novels and comic strips, reviews and art. Submit fiction, articles, art, or links to your own site to [editor@schlock.co.uk](mailto:editor@schlock.co.uk). We will also review published and self-published novels. Please contact the editor at the above email address for further details.

Any other enquiries, including requests to advertise in our quarterly printed magazine, also to [editor@schlock.co.uk](mailto:editor@schlock.co.uk) The stories, articles and illustrations contained in this webzine are copyright © to the respective authors and illustrators, unless in the public domain.

Schlock! Webzine and its editor accept no liability for views expressed or statements made by contributors to the magazine.

*This Edition*

This week's cover illustration is *Goblin Banker* by [garyh18](#). Graphic design © by Gavin Chappell, logo design © by C Priest Brumley.

EDITORIAL

IT CAME FROM INSIDE THE INKWELL! *Horror Comics and Comic Horror from Vincent Davis: CARTOON*

THE LEPRECHAUN'S RAINBOW Part One by Aaron Pfau—“*You won't forget about me pot of gold, will you?*” FANTASY

ZED by Ste Whitehouse—*Zombie Retro Virus...* HORROR

MONKEYFICATION by Christopher T Dabrowski—“*We are, I am guests.*” HORROR

THEY WALK AMONG US by Steven Havelock—*Another flying object flashed across the sky...* HORROR

WHITE DEW by Rob Bliss—*Very few, except the truly paranoid, ever looked up...* HORROR

THE SEARCH FOR ASTRA PALACE Part Fifty by Gregory KH Bryant—*Gonna getcha, bitch...* SPACE OPERA

ERIC BRIGHTYES Chapter Ten by H Rider Haggard—*How Asmund Spoke With Swanhild...* SWORD AND SORCERY

THE MOON POOL Chapter Twenty Nine by A. Merritt—*The Building of the Moon Pool...* SCIENCE FICTION CLASSIC

## EDITORIAL

This week, a little girl meets a leprechaun, a scientist searches for the cure to the zombie virus, a psychologist makes an unexpected discovery in a neurotic woman's psyche, and a policewoman teams up with a UFO expert to solve a case. Meanwhile up in the sky the chem trails are swirling.

Out in space, Carter Ward's adventures continue. Back in the Dark Ages, Asmund speaks with Swanhild. And down under the earth, the building of the Moon Pool commences.

—Gavin Chappell

Now available from Rogue Planet Press: [\*Schlock Quarterly Vol 3 Issue 7\*](#)



[Return to Contents](#)

IT CAME FROM INSIDE THE INKWELL!

## IT CAME FROM INSIDE THE INKWELL!

By Vincent Davis



"I THINK I'M SELF-DESTRUCTIVE, I ONCE FELL IN LOVE WITH A LUMBERJACK."

*Vincent is an artist who has consistently been on assignment in the art world for over twenty years. Throughout his career he has acquired a toolbox of diverse skills (from freehand drawing to digital design, t shirt designer to muralist). His styles range from the wildly abstract to pulp style comics.*

*In 2013, his work in END TIMES won an award in the Best Horror Anthology category for that year. When Vincent is not at his drawing board he can be found in the classroom teaching cartooning and illustration to his students at Westchester Community College in Valhalla NY.*

*He lives in Mamaroneck NY with his wife Jennie and dog Skip.*

<https://www.freelanced.com/vincentdavis>

[Return to Contents](#)

## THE LEPRECHAUN'S RAINBOW by Aaron Pfau

### Part I.

I first saw the leprechaun on the morning of March 17th. St. Patrick's Day. Just a little over a week after we moved into our new house in Harald Falls, Minnesota. I was eight.

"Naomi, not so far from the house!" my mother called out.

"I'm still in the backyard," I replied.

I plucked a clover from the ground and held it up close to my eyes for scrutiny. One, two, three, I counted. Three leaves. Ugh, I groaned, and discarded it into the patch of similar clovers that formed a green pool around my boots.

My mother's voice floated out to me from inside our house. "If I can't see you from the kitchen window, you're too far."

Rolling my eyes, I slouched out from the small thicket of woods that fringed our backyard. Our new house might not have been anything to look at, but I loved our backyard. It was so big and had so many new places to explore. I dragged my feet until I was within sight of the kitchen window, where my mother stood like a portrait in a picture frame. A portrait of a skeleton, I thought. She looked really exhausted.

"Come on," I whined. "I haven't been able to explore since we moved here. I want to see what's in the woods."

"You know I can't leave your father right now," mom replied wearily. "He's not feeling well again."

"You mean he's drunk again," I muttered underneath my breath, my voice pitched low, so that my mother couldn't hear.

"You're not to go in the woods. Do you understand? I don't want you wandering off too far by yourself," mom said. She hadn't heard my last remark.

"But I'm not by myself," I argued. "Barry's with me."

As if on cue, Barry barked with excitement.

Barry was my best and closest friend. The only one to follow us on the move from our old house in the city to our new house out here, in the middle of nowhere. Barry is our family's Scottish Terrier. Scottish Terror, mom jokingly calls him. He's always getting into the trash or something.

“I thought you were getting my dinner. How long are you gonna keep me waiting?” dad’s voice rang out, harsh and slurred. A tone that we’ve all grown familiar with in the past few months. “Ugh, my head. Honey? Honey!”

Mom sighed heavily. I could see the exasperation on her face, which was masked with a net of fine wrinkles that I hadn’t noticed before the move. Her frizzled black hair hung listlessly over her left shoulder like a wet dishrag hanging across the front of a stove.

“Just stay in the yard, both of you,” mom pleaded helplessly. “Please.”

“Pinky promise,” I said, holding up one of my pinkies to illustrate my sincerity.

She smiled, but it wasn’t a good one. Then she stepped out of the window frame.

“Come on, Barry,” I said, wandering back to the patch of clovers in the woods, my boots making squishing sounds in the wet grass. Above, the sky loomed overcast and dark. It had rained all morning. The drizzle had just finally stopped. “I know there’s a four-leaf clover in here somewhere.”

Barry bit down on one of my pant legs, trying to pull me back towards the lawn, whining.

“I’m not going all the way in,” I said. “Just a little.”

I knew that I shouldn’t disobey my mom and go back into the woods, but that’s where the clovers were. Dozens of them. Hundreds! Maybe even a four-leaf one. A four-leaf clover means good luck, and right now, our family could use all of the good luck that we could get.

You see, it never used to be like this. My mom used to be so happy back in the city, and dad never drank. But that was back when dad worked at the public-school building, before he was fired. Mom would say laid off, but I know that’s not what really happened. With dad out of work, mom couldn’t make enough at the cashiering job that she was forced to take to make the house payments. I’m not really sure what happened afterward, just that the bank came by one day and foreclosed on us, and we weren’t allowed to step foot inside of our house anymore. So, we packed up our belongings and moved out here, where houses could be bought cheap. I can’t imagine why, mom had cracked sarcastically when she had first laid eyes on the gross one-storey house that we would now be living in. Neither could I.

I squatted down until the tops of my rubber knee-high rain boots touched my chin, and resumed the tedious task of searching through all of the clovers, counting the number of leaves on each. The hood of my yellow raincoat cupped over my head.

“Are you finding anything over there?” I asked Barry, who was sniffing around in the corner of the patch that I had entrusted to him. He wasn’t.

“One, two, three,” I counted, tossing the unlucky clover behind my left shoulder, picking a fresh one. “One, two, three.” Toss, pick. “One, two, three—”

“Four.”

Huh, I said aloud, glancing up.

I would have been startled and probably would have ran if the voice that spoke to me wasn't so pleasant. It sounded like a child's voice, yet when I looked up, the face that stared back at me was old, crinkly, and red bearded.

Quickly, I rose, standing, and was astonished to find that the man before me wasn't much taller than myself. In fact, he stood a few inches shorter. At first, I thought that he must have been kneeling or even sitting on the ground, but when I looked down, I observed that his shoes were standing flat among the clovers. What strange shoes, I remember thinking.

After my brain registered the initial shock, I fully took in the strange man's appearance. Strange was right! His shoes had pointed tips and were green with golden brass buckles. His hat was green too and also pointed. It reminded me of an elf's hat. The kind that I put on Barry every year at Christmas. He always takes them off and chews them to pieces. The man's coat and pants—clover green, like the rest of his costume—looked like something from one of my made-up fairy tale books. Of course, I thought with glee, that's where I recognized him from! I could tell at once that the man standing before me was a leprechaun. If I had been thirteen, I wouldn't have believed my very eyes. But I wasn't thirteen. I was just an eight-year-old kid.

“Please, do not run away,” he said. His voice was high-pitched and infantile, like the voice of SpongeBob in the cartoons, but with a heavy accent. “I believe you are looking for this.” The leprechaun extended his right arm out towards me. In his white-gloved hand, he held a clover. I could count four leaves on it.

“Oh, wow, thanks!” I said, snatching the clover in my hands. I noticed the white frills of lace around the leprechaun's wrists.

“Anything for a friend,” the leprechaun replied, and then giggled, clapping his hands together.

“Where did you find it?” I asked.

Beaming widely, the leprechaun pointed to his hat. “A real leprechaun always keeps a four-leaf clover in the brim of his hat for good luck.”

“Are you a real leprechaun?” I asked with astonishment.

The little man offered a low bow, kneeling down on one knee, the tip of his hat almost sweeping the grass as he did so. “As I kneel, I am a leprechaun, true and real. As true to my fame, I go by many a name. But you may call me Charlie, if you so wish.”

Barry growled menacingly.

“Barry, where are your manners?” I scolded. Then, to the leprechaun, I introduced myself. “I’m Naomi,” I said, “and this is Barry.” I pointed beside me to Barry, who still paced warily back and forth, his neck fur bristling.

“Pleased to meet you both,” replied Charlie the leprechaun, removing his hat and tipping it.

“Are four-leaf clovers really good luck? That’s what my story book says,” I asked shyly, holding the clover to my chest.

“Do not disbelieve. With one of those in your possession, you’ll find that your luck may take on a new leaf,” said Charlie. “My gift to you. So, as a bargain to make, if my luck I may lend, may I call you a friend?”

Wow, I thought, friends with a real-life leprechaun. Mom and dad are never going to believe this!

“Friends,” I agreed, shaking hands with the leprechaun. He giggled again, and started dancing merrily, jumping into the air and kicking his feet together.

“Oh, I’m so glad!” cried the leprechaun. “I’ve always wanted a friend.”

All of my old friends were back in Belmont, almost fifty miles away, and I was also excited at making my first new friend out here. Besides, back in the city, I didn’t have a leprechaun for a friend.

“You just have to meet my mom,” I said.

“’Twould do no good, I am afraid,” he replied. “For, you see, the ability to see us leprechauns disappears with age.”

A bright idea suddenly came to me. Came to me from my picture book, *How to Catch a Leprechaun*. “When you catch a leprechaun, are you really granted three wishes?”

Here, Charlie the leprechaun stopped dancing. His wide smile dropped to a frown. He covered his eyes with his hands and began sobbing sadly. I could see twinkling tears drizzling down his rosy cheeks. “Catching a leprechaun is not something that I would expect from one who calls himself a friend,” he replied softly.

I suddenly felt really bad. I mean, terrible. Awful! I had just made friends with this leprechaun, and here I was, already thinking of nothing but me, me, me.

“I’m sorry,” I quickened to say, putting my hands on the leprechaun’s shoulders to comfort him. “I would never do that to you. Cross my heart.”

Sniffing, he wiped his eyes and peered at me meekly underneath the brim of his hat. “And hope to die?” he inquired.

“And hope to die,” I repeated.

This cheered the leprechaun up, and he smiled gaily again. Barry was still being a brat, growling and making a fuss, watching Charlie closely from between my feet.

“I’m really sorry,” I said. “It’s just... I could sure use three wishes right now. You see, things have been really rough for my family lately.”

“And what, if I may ask,” he said, “would you wish for?”

The question caught me off guard. I thought about it long and hard. “Let’s see,” I said at last. “For my dad to get his old job back, for my mom to be happy again, and for us to move back into our old house. That’s what I would wish for.” I blushed as I saw the leprechaun observing me, a thoughtful expression on his face.

He seemed to be lost in deep thought. Finally, his face lit up. He snapped his fingers together and said, “As long as our friendship holds strong, the three wishes are sadly gone. But I may know of another way to get what you wish, and my friendship, you would never have to miss.”

“How?” I asked, hardly able to contain my excitement.

“As you have undoubtedly been told, us leprechauns prize nothing above our pots of gold,” he said. “But, alas, mine is hopelessly lost. If you were to help me find it, we may both share in the cost.”

“A pot of gold!” I marvelled. “With that much gold my dad wouldn’t have to worry about finding a job ever again. And we could afford to buy back our old house!”

“Exactly so,” said the leprechaun.

“Naomi! Naomi!” I could hear my mom’s voice calling my name and the patio door creaking open.

“That’s my mom,” I said. “Listen, I have to go. It was really nice meeting you.”

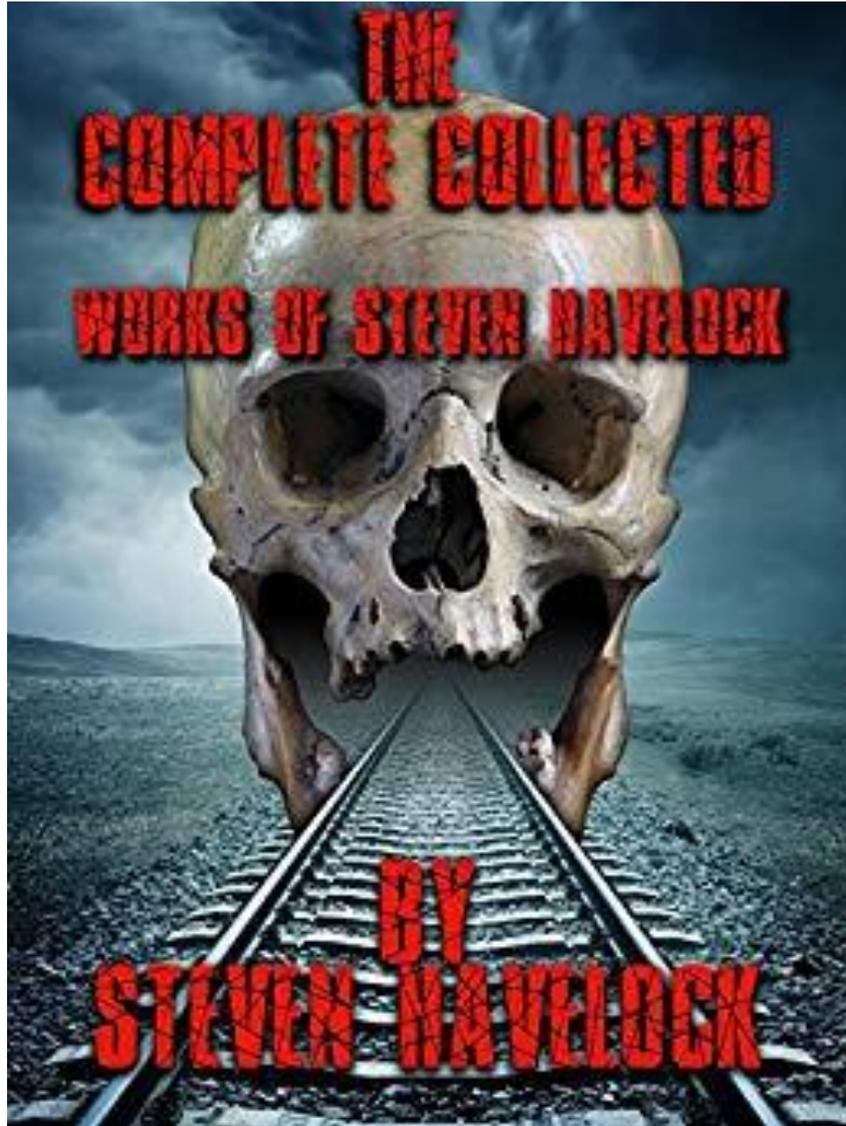
Charlie the leprechaun frowned. “Must you go back? Are you sure that you can’t stay and play for a while?”

“I wish I could,” I replied apologetically. “But I promised my mom that I would be back in time to help with dinner. Well, goodbye.” I waved to Charlie as I ran off in the direction of my house. Barry, who seemed thankful to be leaving, followed quickly behind.

“You won’t forget about me pot of gold, will you?” the leprechaun called out.

“I won’t!” I called back.

CONTINUES NEXT WEEK



[Return to Contents](#)

ZED by Ste Whitehouse

Subject Theta had died for 197 seconds. I sat back and quickly confirmed the ECG readings and then looked over his blood works. O2 was obviously low, CO2 higher than the norm. A slight imbalance of electrolytes as the body fought against cellular death. The insignificant chemical trace of the potassium used to stop his heart. Nothing vastly dissimilar to the other twenty seven staged 'deaths' we've run through here.

I checked his viral load. No sign of the HR2ZV activating at all. Considering the horrific effects this retro virus has wrought on mankind it's bloody hard to motivate it into working. I checked Subject Theta's timeline. The cocktail of drugs were administered at 10:45am. His controlled descent into death came at 10:51. Defibrillation was commenced at 10:54 or 180 seconds after time of death. One shot, 75 joules, and the subject's heart restarted as planned. Just like clockwork; but the damned Human Romero Type 2 Zombie Retro Virus did not activate.

I'm tired. I woke just after two this morning and could not get back to sleep; felt as though I was being watched even though the room was empty apart from myself. Serves me right for sleeping on a camp bed next to my office I suppose. I take a gulp of hot coffee before continuing. Shifting Theta's data across the smart desktop into the digital holding folder and tapping Iota's file. It opens up with all of her latest data streams. Subject Iota had died for 209 seconds. ECG flat-lining, blood works similar to Theta's; viral load nil. It would be another three months before we could perform more 'assisted deaths.' Three months trying to figure out how the damn virus worked.

More to the point; why it worked the way it did. The HR2ZV was, at its heart, a bog standard retro virus. Communicable only by close contact, hence the overwhelming desire to bite and chew. It invaded every type of cell in a human body. Studies had shown it even in ovarian and testicular tissue. Death was a sexually communicable disease it seemed. At least Zombie death was. Once in a cell it spliced itself into the hosts own DNA. So far so normal.

Then it appears to just lie dormant; unobserved. We've only just developed markers to find it in living tissue and even then the buggger is good at hiding. God, give me good old HIV any day. We haven't even figured a good trajectory for the disease. You would think that once a good proportion of the host's cells held the new viral code there would be a kicking in—a taking over—but even at 100% occupation there is nothing. It hides in plain sight—virally speaking—and does sweet Fanny Adams. Only on death does the virus actually activate; kicking in a number of responses that animate the corpse.

We all know about Zombies and what they are. What I'm trying to research is how long is dead? What does the virus do then? When does the virus start to take effect?

Spinning around in my chair I face out onto the street below. Dreary rain falls from a dull steel sky. A typical British summer. I glance at a few of the colourful umbrellas as they rush across the street or along the slick pavements. Fewer than before; much fewer. Thinned out. Culled. Call it what you like. The human race has gone through the flames and emerged, not quite phoenix like. Sure life goes on. But we all know the horrible truth now. Almost all of us have

contracted HR2ZV; at least 89% of humanity at the last count—the bugger is easier to catch than the clap from an old prossie.

And when we die?

I try to focus my thoughts. Forget the monumental task ahead, try not to even think of a cure. That is WAAAAAY down the line. Break the task into smaller pieces. But how much smaller can you get? If we can't find out WHY it activates then how can we even begin to stop it?

Actually I admire the virus. It is the perfect survivor. Evolution at its finest—for a virus. Often the balance between keeping your host alive and killing it is so very fine; but HR2ZV has solved this elegantly. Kill the host then reanimate the body. Simplicity itself.

The first recorded outbreak was in 1932, appropriately in Haiti; the home of the Zombie myth. The Halperin incident where—ironically—it was a white woman who initially succumbed. No one has ever been able to link that first outbreak with the culture or general background of the area. Then nothing was heard from the virus until over 30 years later when in 1966, and in Cornwall of all places, an outbreak of HR2ZV occurred in a tin mine.

So much has been written about the commonalities between the two sites. Places where heavy labour was necessary. That mainly it was workers, the poorer demographic who had been affected. Theories abounded for a while that it was due to poor sanitation or ill-health brought on by manual labour. It was only when the next outbreak two years later in rural Pennsylvania occurred that the full range of the virus hit home. Here was the first large scale infection and it effected everyone across the board. The Romero effect they called it initially and the name stuck to the virus—some lab rat's sense of morbid humour. Worldwide we had to rethink our feelings of superiority. Suddenly the smart and the rich—or at least the comfortably well off—could be infected as well.

Over the next decade the virus moved into the cities. In 1978 there was a mixture of civil unrest, rioting and Zombies in Pittsburgh. A handful of survivors were found in a shopping mall on the city's outskirts. After that there was no major outbreak for almost thirty years. When this next occurred in London in 2002 there was conjecture that the virus had a decade's long cycle. A possibility nullified when my team discovered that this virus was a mutation on HR2ZV, which we called HR3ZRV. The second R standing for 'Running'.

Thankfully that strain ran its course, pun intended, within twenty eight weeks and—despite reports to the contrary—it was confined easily in London. We were left waiting for HR2ZV's resurgence. We did not have to wait long when in 2013 multiple worldwide outbreaks occurred that sorely tested the resolve of our species. The world was literally at war with itself.

Now here we are a couple of years later. Slimmer, healthier but also wary. Knowledge that we carry this virus within our cells has permeated all aspect of our lives now. There no longer is any perception of a 'peaceful' death. Death only leads to reanimation. There is no 'spiritual' resurrection in the modern world; it has become all too physically real. Cremation of the dead despite their chance of infection has become a way of life. Death is now communal. Who would

want to die alone only to return as a means of transferring the virus to a loved one? The loner is looked upon as some form of deviant. If you have no family you still have Family. Connectedness, openness is seen not only as desirable but obligatory. Belonging is compulsory.

Major faiths collapsed whilst minor ones flourished. Some offered redemption, others acceptance. Still others a cure. The world was turned upside down and sideways. And through all that time I continued my studies. Assistants have come and gone. Technicians flowed into one another; but I stayed the course, looking, probing, examining everything. Like a woman obsessed, for truly I am, I peered into the gutter life of the Zombie, tearing apart HR2ZV and putting it back together.

Its genome was fully sequenced a year ago. We know—I know—what makes it tick. The phosphates and sugars and bases that cling to each other to create the virus that makes the monster. The elegant double helix that encompasses its deathly cargo. But even that knowledge is unhelpful; flawed. Knowing the enemy does not make it any less deadly; does not bring succour. All it does is make us feel informed. Educated. What is missing is the means to stop it. An anti-viral that will curtail its activation.

Hence this latest project. Nine volunteers willing to be chemically murdered again and again. To have their life taken from them so that we can observe how the virus works on activation. Only it doesn't. Not in under 417 seconds; the longest one of our test subjects has been 'clinically dead.'

I turn back to the data but I can recall each and every subject and their results with a clarity that probably borders on the obsessive. I shuffle folders across the smart desk, reviewing ECG with ECG, Potassium levels with Potassium levels. An hour later I still have nothing.

Sitting back I notice that the intercom icon is flashing. I minimise the desktop and tap the call. "Yes?" I had left strict instructions with Luci so this must be important.

"Ms Sharma is here, Ma'am." The webcam was disabled but she must have heard the exasperation in my tone, "She really needs to see you, Ma'am. I explained that you were tied up with assessments." Assessments was Luci's code for urgent.

"Of course, Luci. Send her through."

Ms Sharma was subject Beta, stage four Neuro-Blastoma—the cells have already metastasised and spread. Barring chemo all we can do is keep her 'comfortable'—and so suitable for a trial in which we 'kill' the patient on a regular basis. I had met and vetted each of the nine subjects and was aware of each of their personal afflictions.

The woman who came through into my office was not the energetic young woman I had met only a few weeks ago. She was gaunt and pale under her naturally darker skin tones. Her eyes were deeply set and the bags under them had taken on the colour of ground coffee. She looked about in a haunted manner, as though something was following her into the room.

I offered her one of the two armchairs and asked if she wanted a drink of any kind, I sat opposite

her and let her pour out her story. She spoke of disturbed nights with multiple bad dreams. Of waking, sure in the knowledge that someone else was in the room with her; although there never was.

Of the dreams themselves, they were almost always similar. A chase in which slowly she finds herself unable to move; a shadow whispering in her ear that multiplies until she can hear hundreds of soft voices swamping her in a crescendo of sound. A sense of becoming trapped and hidden beneath something else. Held in her body unable to reach out.

She tells me of patches of dry skin, almost dead she says, that are appearing on her body. She shows me one such patch on her right arm. I'm not a Dermatologist or Oncologist so cannot really say if this is an effect of her drug regime or not. I take some samples of blood and tissue. I bag them ready to be sent down to the labs.

I try to comfort her as best I can. Platitudes really; trying to wrap hard edged truth in softer wool, hoping that no one will really notice. As we speak, she fiddles with her engagement ring; twisting it back and forth. She bites her bottom lip nervously and hardly looks up at me. When I do catch her eye a spark seems to have vanished.

Finally she leaves and I beckon Luci into my office. She comes in and closes the door. "Before you say a word." She raised a hand, "Hear me out. Six of the cohort have contacted me with the same dream over the past few weeks. Not..." She carried on quickly before I could say a word. "... similar. The same. A chase in which they find themselves slowly unable to move. A whispering shadow that becomes hundreds of voices; each whispering but together deafening."

"Okay. This might mean something but I'm not a Psychologist. These are all terminally ill patients. Dreams of helplessness, possibly being chased are bound to be a reoccurring motif."

"One more thing. I asked them to contact me when they had their next dream and let me know what it was like and when it was. They all contacted me this morning. All six dreamt that they were being chased through an overgrown grey Hyde Park, along Speakers Corner. Every one of them woke at 2:17am."

Luci hands me the transcript she had typed up. This is... odd. Luci turns to leave and then looks at me. "Ma'am? What happens if the virus becomes active in someone who is alive?"

"It doesn't. It simply lies dormant until death and then somehow activates and reanimates. That's what this study is trying to identify, the point that the virus activates."

"I understand that, Ma'am, but what happens if someone dies and the virus is activated but then they are resuscitated? That's what's happening to the people in the study, right? They're dying then being brought back to life. Could that create some sort of living Zombie?"

"Of course not! That would be preposterous!"

"Why?"

I stare at her as she leaves the office. Suddenly I notice how drawn she is, tired looking. A random thought comes to me. A dream from the night before. Running, being chased; my limbs slowly seizing up; and a whisper. I look out at the street below and realise that I'm scratching my arm. Some dry skin that has been irritating me for the past few days. It is mottled and grey, unfeeling. I wonder about the efficacy of the virus; how easily it is transmitted and how we all appear to be susceptible to its touch. I wonder about reinfection of a new strain, a different virus; and I consider Luci's question and a thought comes to mind.

'What if it was not so preposterous?'

THE END



Available from [Amazon](#).

[Return to Contents](#)

MONKEYFICATION by Christopher T Dabrowski. Translation by Monika Olasek.

‘He’s fucking Martha!’ Beth cried.

I tried to look like someone who cares.

‘Go on,’ I was very encouraging yet gentle.

I really didn’t give a fuck what kind of marriage she had. I was numbed because how often can you listen to the same, or similar, stuff? Please note I’ve been working in this business for over five years now, I hear such stories all the time. He was with her best friend, with a secretary, right after their wedding, right before the wedding, “IN MY OWN BED”, “in the underwear I gave him for his birthday” (bastard!). STOP! Cut!—a director would shout out. How many times can you listen to that? Well, how many?

You may say I’m callous. In fact, we all are. Do you stop when you pass a skinny, freezing cold beggar in the street? No, you don’t. Most of us just begin to walk faster, pretending not to see the man. A HUMAN BEING. Well, dear readers, who is without sin, let him first cast a stone!

Lately I’ve realized I can understand why surgeons who carry out several operations daily are so insensitive. On one hand, they are in a similar situation to mine, even much tougher. On the other hand, they are too busy to get bored. They cannot fantasize while operating ‘cause they would cut out the wrong kidney or leave something inside the patient’s body (well, okay, I admit there are some dreamers among them! Otherwise where would the million dollars suits come from?)

What about me? I guess I can have my head in the clouds from time to time, to escape to a better world. After all, as soon as I heard, “He’s fucking Martha”, I knew exactly where it was going, what this patient of mine would tell me. I could even bet and win lots of money (well, I guess as a psychologist dealing with bad mannered and nouveau riche ladies, bored, sick and tired, I was also earning not badly). Even if a patient stopped babbling suddenly, I’d just pretend

VERY

focused, I’d shake my head and say I must analyse everything calmly. Then I’d change the subject and voila! Those tearful babblings turned chaotic, the patient would start saying something and then began saying something else. Either she blamed herself or her partner, sometimes there was no one to blame (only this TWO-FACED BITCH who tricked and seduced the poor husband).

Beth was weeping but good. Her sweaty double chin shook like a jelly. I gave her handkerchiefs, thinking how well I understood why her husband doesn’t want to hump her anymore. She had turned into something that could arouse only a fetishist for weight.

Cruel? Perhaps, but also very true.

She wiped light green snot from her nose, sniffed twice and gave me a blank look, waiting for something. She looked like a sack of flour, because she was not only fat but also horribly pale, sallow, one might say. Dark circles around her eyes indicated a lack of sleep, she also smelled. As if such a rich woman couldn't afford a deodorant. Well, maybe she had just decided

(Nobody likes me! Nobody loves me!)

not to care, because it's not worth it, she's not worth it.

'Listen Beth, I have to put you into a hypnotic trance.'

She nodded eagerly as if I was her last resort—it's a pity she doesn't understand that SHE is the last resort for HERSELF. All I can do is to guide Beth, but she's the one who must understand this. I've tried a number of times to raise her self-esteem, I've prompted her to start exercising, practice some sport, to start caring about her appearance. Of course, she was determined to do so, but her enthusiasm disappeared even before the driver managed to drive the fuckin' lady home (as if Beth couldn't walk home once in a while, to burn some calories!).

I put down the blinds to block out a beautiful sunny July day and we found ourselves in the darkness of the grave.

'Lie down,' I told her softly.

The couch creaked miserably as Beth got ready to lie down.

'Just lie down and try not to think. Concentrate on breathing. Breathe slowly, very slowly.'

It was very quiet, just like in a real grave also because the unmoving body of the woman looked like a big grotesque mummy that might wake up any second.

I waited for a while or so—which can seem like a couple of minutes for the relaxing person—I really didn't want Mrs Halligan to turn into Sleeping Beauty size XXL. However, since our society is getting bigger and bigger, without any doubt there will soon be another, fatter film version of the story. A heart-warming tale: since the Sleeping Beauty herself has got some love handles, everybody else has the right to have it, too, and nobody can mind. And viewers will be happy to justify their eating habits, hamburgers and fries for breakfast. I guess in several years we will call overweight women beautiful. Lies, sweet little lies!

I started counting as usual. Before I said five, Beth had already fallen into a deep trance. It was easy to recognize this state when a person was entering it, all the face muscles become flabby and the patient looks like, well, a corpse.

I decided to do something that is not quite ethical—instead of digging in Beth’s psyche in search of well-hidden problems, problems probably even from her childhood, instead of a long painful therapy that lasts for months, I decided to fix the matters shallowly. I thought it would be good for her to see some positive results of the therapy quickly. It doesn’t matter that in a month everything will be the same as before, but now...

NOW!

I needed results. I really didn’t want her to quit. Oh no, no fuckin’ way! There would be a snowball effect; she would tell all her friends and they would tell theirs, awful rumours with even more awful accusations: INEFFECTIVE!

I couldn’t let it happen. Only thanks to those moody ladies with problems can I live my luxurious life—only thanks to them. So my last but unethical resort in these helpless circumstances was to reprogram her consciousness.

I had to code a few important issues into her mind, issues that within a month would be finally rejected by her consciousness—they would be in conflict with the uncured problems from her childhood. You might say that for a moment I was going to be a unique computer gig fixing her spiritual Windows.

The woman was lying motionless, like a wax doll. After all the crying, she was as calm as an angel. She had flabby cheeks and was drooling.

‘Beth, can you hear me clearly?’

‘Yes,’ she answered, like a machine, almost without opening her mouth.

‘Listen to me very carefully now. You will do whatever I will tell you to do, do you understand?’

‘Yes.’

It’s really amazing just how toneless and inhuman a voice a person in a trance has.

‘You feel safe. You feel good. You feel loved by the world every day. People around you are kind and friendly. You like yourself just as you are. You aim to be perfect. You easily forgive people you love.’ (If she suddenly decided to get divorced, who would pay for her therapy? Apart from that, I would be cursed as “INEFFECTIVE”).

I was being sweet and encouraging for over ten minutes and about to move her out of this state when something tempted me to try a little experiment.

‘Who are you?’ I asked.

I always wanted to ask this a person in such a state, but so far I had not.

‘A human being,’ she said in a metallic and harsh voice like a robot.

‘Who else?’

In the twilight, Beth’s face looked demonic, like some kind of spectre ready to throw itself on me any second.

‘It is a woman!’

This answer surprised me. Why did her subconscious respond with “IT IS”? It could answer with just: “a woman”. This response gave me a crazy idea that I might be close to making some kind of discovery.

A DISCOVERY!

A discovery—a dream word for every man of science. I felt that if I played my cards right, I’d find myself where no one else had been before. I’d be a pioneer. “IT IS A WOMAN” didn’t sound very true, though. It sounded like an answer that was supposed to mislead the audience, but not me, I’m too wise for that! I am not so easily misled by some trifle.

‘And who are YOU?’

It was so quiet, as if her mind—her spiritual system—had broken down. She started trembling, it looked like a beginning of an epileptic attack. I felt an icy spit stabbing into my heart. My stomach shrank to the size of a nut and was hard as a stone. I had to grab a table, otherwise I’d fall.

‘You fucked up,’ something was shouting in my head. ‘You fucked up her brain! Oh my God!’

I was absolutely convinced that she had fallen into a coma and would be a vegetable for the rest of her life and I’d be accused of medical malpractice.

I almost shit my pants, I was really scared when suddenly she spoke—or rather, *it* spoke because this voice did not resemble a human voice at all. It wasn’t even a voice, it was... as if a thought-thunder was shot from her mouth and blew up in my head with a bang. But I understood the message:

‘We are, I am guests.’

My legs were weak, I fell on my knees.

‘Guests?’ I muttered.

Another short explosion inside my skull only confirmed the fact. I felt a little tickling in my head as if something was grabbing my deepest soul. It wasn't pleasant at all but I was really excited and curious about what more I might find out. I decided to pry a bit more.

'Why guests?'

A series of bangs. Something squeezed my brain a little but I got the message:

'Among the stars...' Incomprehensible noise. — 'We travel, between dimensions I travel.' Crackling as if someone was tuning the radio. 'You were curious... we, I, decided to guest in you.'

That's exactly what it said: "to guest". I was about to faint, seeing double, but forced myself to go on anyway.

'Why to guest?' I muttered almost noiselessly.

There was so much noise inside my head it was as if a band of mad drummers were playing a festival! I was shivering and had to lick my chapped lips.

I felt a metallic taste in my mouth. I touched my nose. My whole hand was covered with blood. I got scared, really scared! I decided to end it all. Right this minute or else this shit would destroy me. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to say anything. I was numb. The noise in my head was getting more and more unbearable. My limp body fell to the floor. I was still conscious. Horrifyingly aware that I might die any moment and if by some chance I'd survive...

Oh God, God, no!

...I would be a cripple!

A CRIPPLE!

My despair overwhelmed me in an acrid wave, but after a while it was silenced by a transfer from the hellish creature—as if a damn interpreter was in my head, insensitive to the drama around us, with admirable persistence doing what he had to do:

'You were okay as carriers, for we, for I, but we, I'm bored.' And just as if it somehow predicted that under normal conditions I'd ask "but why simultaneously I and we?" the thing answered: 'We are one. We are a mind scattered in many consciousnesses. We live inside of you for me to gain experience. We must learn for me to be more perfect. Your world is coming to an end. I've sucked most of the experience while being you. You wanted to know, so now you know, however you are also us, me. We may be sitting here but I'm sitting inside of you. I am your souls.'

A human mind (human?) is bizarre; suddenly, in this terrifying moment, I remembered what Kate said once —Kate, my friend and also a lover for a few months (when she was in the mood for being single)—. A devoted Buddhist, Kate was trying hard to convince me to meditate. She even wanted to trick me into this by saying:

‘Man, do you know what this can do to your potency?’

I’ve asked her sometimes what was really with the Buddhism stuff and meditation, what did she see in it and Kate always answered, dreadfully serious, that she connects with the unity. That when you enter a higher level of something and you reach a state that is more like a grunge band than a spiritual state for me, the moment you join the collective consciousness.

Another painful bang inside my head:

‘And now I have to neutralize you.’

The last thought that was on my (still MINE) fading mind was not to beg for mercy or attempt to resist. It wasn’t an accelerated self-examination either. Not even a prayer to God. I only thought briefly that people of all religions believe in a soul as a sign of God. In my situation though, God turned out to be a repulsive being that doesn’t give a fuck for the believers!

After a while I found myself in pitch darkness. I wasn’t a human being, Mr Adams, a psychologist, anymore. I became the Creature—a part of it. I became a part of primeval all-consciousness. I was all-experiencing! I was grateful to the Creature. The Creature I was a part of. It was a gratitude for releasing me from the chains of corporality... from the cage that limited my mind!

----

*A press release in New York Times dated July 1, 2009:*

*“Yesterday morning famous psychologist, John A. was found dead in his office along with the unconscious wife of a well-known businessman, Mark H. The woman was hospitalized, she is in a deep coma. At the moment the causes of the tragedy are not clear and they are subject to police investigation”.*

----

Three years later.

U.S.—New York:

An enormous bang was heard. A huge Boeing had hit a skyscraper with one wing. Half of the wing broke and started falling down to a crowded street along with pieces of glass. There was no reaction. Nobody was even looking up to the sky—the world had never seen the chaos down

below before. Cars were burning clenched together in a metallic hug. The buildings were also burning, many cars had collided with them. Drivers who survived the crashes had more on their minds than the looks of their beloved vehicles. A little boy who had just been walking his beloved dog Moppy for a walk to the Central Park, now was biting avidly into the guts of the pet which was whining more and more quietly. As he tore out another scrap an elderly woman attacked the boy. She tore out the animal from the child, its intestines fell down to the pavement. The woman started getting away, limping ridiculously. The little boy started growling, getting ready to chase her.

He was about to get up but he was hit by a fragment of the plane wing. A shouting, biting and beating crowd of people were hit by pieces of glass. Severed limbs were scattered all over the streets. Within just a couple of minutes almost everybody was covered with gore, their own or their opponents. A mad howling of the injured was heard. In the meantime, the plane dived lower and lower until it crashed into a tenement house. A huge burning mushroom cloud appeared.

Poland—Pcim Dolny (in the middle of nowhere):

A while ago Adrian had been dancing, looking excitedly at a very shapely girl. The lights were pulsating like crazy. The music was pounding rhythmically. In just one moment everything around him became distant and unknown. His favourite kind of music was now only an annoying and chaotic mixture of sounds. He was so excited that he couldn't even hide it but he didn't really care about anything anymore. He even forgot his name and who he was. Nothing seemed to matter anymore. Only one thing matter—to copulate with that dam! The boy grabbed her,;she fell on her stomach but didn't defend herself, the girl was shaking her booty instead, unaware she'd be dead in a second.

She didn't notice when a man who was dancing nearby out of the blue jumped up with a loud yell.

Now, as he fell down, he smashed her head with his boots. In a split second her face was a grey mash of brain, hair and squashed skull. The one who had been Adrian a minute ago didn't mind, he didn't even notice anything. He was holding the trembling body tightly. He tried to copulate but something rough holding its body below the waist made this impossible. He screamed with rage, not realizing it was only her trousers. The screaming was inaudible because of a mad shouting, growling and wheezing. More and more blood was appearing on the floor... Sunday, bloody Sunday!

Japan—Tokyo Stock Exchange:

The day was coming to an end. Another session was about to be closed. The closing prices of the stocks were mostly high and still going up. All the screens were radiant with green. People wanted to make the best of it, this was truly a wonderful moment when, after so many days with red screens, the stocks finally decided to go higher. It was amazingly noisy. Everyone was trying

to be more audible than the others. Everybody was waving sheets of paper, held tightly in their hands.

Yien, always calm and in control, even called for fun by his mates “a monk”, suddenly hit his best friend Chong on the head—really hard. Chong turned around and smiled with hatred but didn’t hit back. His friend stuck his fingers between his eyes and eye sockets and with one strong move he literally ripped Chong’s face off. The ripping skin sounded like a piece of paper being torn. Chong’s face hung miserably from Yien’s clenched fist. Nobody even noticed this little row of old friends—all shareholders around were shouting just like samurais before a ritual seppuku and throwing themselves at one another in a murder rage.

That evening the closing time was red again...

----

If someone were watching the Earth from the Moon, he would see with surprise that a huge luminous cloud, almost as big as the whole planet, was detaching. The cloud was sparkling in all colours with such an intensity that the viewer’s joy would be overwhelming. The cloud turned into a ball the size of the Moon. It was still for a minute while a little crack formed in the blackness of the universe. It radiated with an unusual brightness—able to burn the eyes if somebody was really watching the show.

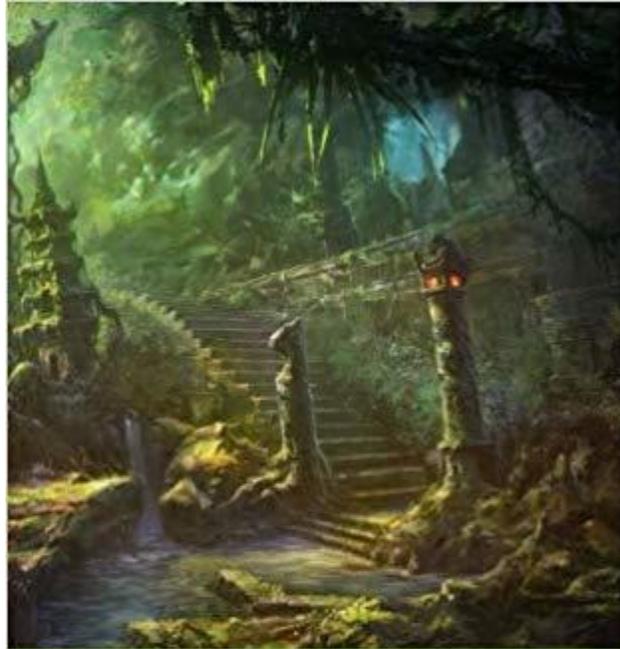
Everything was over, in just the twinkling of an eye; the crack absorbed this multi-coloured thing, almost like a yearning mother holding her long unseen child, and sealed.

He... They... The creature... left the Earth.

Something has come to an end so that far, far away, in another dimension, something new could begin...

THE END

The film *Aniol*, inspired by Christopher T Dabrowski’s stories, can be seen [here](#).



**Sherlock Holmes**

and the Beast-men of Atlantis

**Milly 'Mad Dog'  
McGuigan**

[Return to Contents](#)

THEY WALK AMONG US by Steven Havelock

*A long time ago when I was a young boy, something happened that would change my life forever, except back then I didn't—I couldn't have known this.*

*Back then we used to live in the countryside. One night, I think it was about 1 pm at night when my whole family and I were woken by strange whirling noises and lights in the sky.*

*My Pa, God bless his soul, was never one to be frightened by odd things. Through my bedroom window I saw something crash into the trees nearby. I heard shouting from my mother as my Pa got his shotgun and went investigate. I waited a few minutes and then silently snuck out to follow my Pa.*

*The further into the dark night I went the more and more my blood seemed to chill. Eventually I caught up with my Pa, there was a large crater where the strange flying thing had crashed. I saw my Pa silhouetted against the bright moon. Three tall spindly silvery shaped beings stood down by the crash site. My blood seemed to chill even more as I saw my Pa raise his shotgun at the edge of the clearing.*

*The first shot struck dead on one other silvery being. It was flung several feet by the force of the blast. I saw another being raise its arm; it had something in its hand. I pulled my Pa down to the ground and out of the way, as a blast flashed out.*

*Another flying object flashed across the sky. The strange beings, of which there were two left now, seemed to float upwards and upwards and into the black night sky. I picked up Pa's gun. I thought he was dead, but later realised that he had only been knocked unconscious. I crossed over to the silvery being that lay sprawled on the damp ground.*

*To my horror it moved. I stood frozen, unsure what to do. The other two beings had nearly reached the flying object which was slowly drawing them upwards. They seemed to be caught in some sort of white light that was lifting them of the ground and into the strange flying object.*

*Without thinking about it, I picked up the small silvery being—it weighed barely anything—and put it into the light which shone from the strange flying object that was hovering in the air.*

*As the thing left my grasp and gravitated upwards. I saw its strange large black eyes.*

Thank you.

*I heard it in my head.*

*What I had no way of knowing was that the small act would change my life forever.*

--Jason Broom

Natalie Jones aimed her gun and tears came to her eyes. She had been a police officer for over five years but never in her wildest dreams believed would she ever have to kill her own son.

She pointed the gun and her finger squeezed on the trigger.

### *The Previous Day*

Natalie was following a man, a suspected murderer. He had already killed two people and Natalie wanted to make sure that she wouldn't be his third.

She saw the strange man enter a late night cafeteria. Inside the stranger pulled out a shotgun. She couldn't tell what was being said but she parked her car and cut the engine as quietly as possible. She silently walked to the premises that her murderer was now holding up.

Natalie got a good look at the murderer. His hair was long and dark, his clothes dirty and grimy with what looked like blood.

The murderer turned round and pointed the gun at Natalie. In a split second Natalie made a decision.

*His eyes... There's something about his eyes, they seem wild and unfocused.*

Natalie opened fire. The dark haired stranger was flung back several times. Then everything seemed to pause and move in slow motion.

A sort of fog or mist rose out of the murderer's body which lay sprawled on the tiled floor of the cafeteria. The strange smoke-like mist, made a beeline for one of the workers. The mist seemed to enter his body. In a split second it had completely disappeared and the worker dashed out the back. Natalie followed but by the time she got outside the establishment—the worker had gone.

Natalie awoke.

*That's the sound of the back door being jarred!*

She had a sixth sense and that was one of the reasons she had survive so long on the force. She pulled her gun from the bottom drawer of the clothes drawer and silently crept downstairs.

A sound in the kitchen!

She waited in the darkness of the doorway to the sitting room.

A shriek rang out as the intruder rushed at her. She opened fire, several volleys. He collapsed to the floor. A strange fog-like mist rose out of the dead body.

Natalie heard her son on the stairs; he had snuck down behind her. The mist made a beeline for her son and in a second it had completely disappeared.

Natalie flicked on the lights. Her son walked calmly down the stairs, but not the way Natalie knew he walked; he seemed to walk like a much older man.

“Michael! Michael, are you alright?”

No reply.

Michael bent down and picked up the dead stranger’s gun, the stranger Natalie now recognised as the worker in the late night cafeteria. Her son aimed the gun at her and opened fire. The bullet missed Natalie by millimetres.

Instinct took over and she returned fire but missed. Another bullet flashed towards her, grazing her temple. She fell to the floor—unconscious.

“He’s not your son anymore. I know he looks like him on the outside but on the inside it is something else.”

“You have spent your life seeking answers. I come to you now, pleading, is there any way to get my son back?”

“None.”

Natalie looked down and tears came to her eyes. She was in the apartment of Jason Broom. The man who had dedicated his entire life investigating UFOs and other phenomena.

“There must be a way?”

“If there is then I do not know it.”

“And anyway, how are you going to find your son no anyway?”

Natalie pulled out a tablet out of her bag.

“With this. When I joined the force I had my son microchipped with this GPS tracking device. It was a precaution in case he ever got kidnapped.”

She switched on the tablet and waited. After loading, the device showed her that her son was just four miles away on the deserted south side of town.

“I want my son back, and you’re coming with me.”

Jason Broom went a shade of white.

“Sure, I will help you, lady. I ain’t yellow.”

“First we have to go back to my place, there’s something I need to get.” A plan was forming in her mind.

A short while later Natalie parked her nondescript family car outside the warehouse they believed contained her son. Jason looked worried.

*It’s as quiet as the grave.*

They found the entrance and entered the large building. Inside it was dark and damp. They walked further and further into the eerie, silent building. Natalie looked down at her tablet.

*Just a bit further.*

Natalie drew her gun and tears came to her eyes.

*I must put an end to this fiend.*

She heard a voice from her left and saw her son aiming a gun at her. She opened fire.

Her son was flung backwards by the force of the blast. A dense fog like smoke started to arise out of his body.

*Now’s the time to put my plan into action. It was precisely for this reason that I didn’t bring any police with me.*

“Jason!”

Jason had been behind her and now stepped forward. The mist seemed to pause in one spot as if it was looking for something. Natalie grabbed Jason and using all her force flung him into the mist.

Jason let out a cry, turned to face her. The mist had disappeared.

*Those eyes! His eyes are wild like I saw just last night!*

She pointed the gun but had no intention of shooting. Jason or the person that had been Jason turned and fled.

Natalie walked over to her son. She found him stirring.

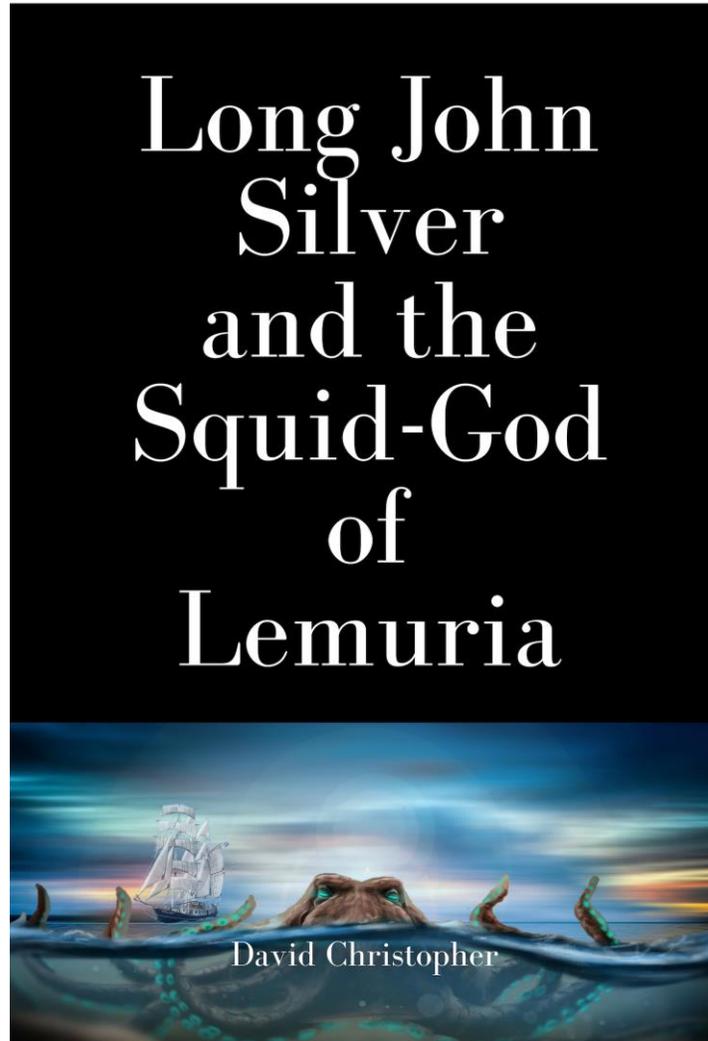
*Yes! My plan worked!* Using rubber bullets had incapacitated her son enough for the fiend inside him to exit.

“Mum? Mum, I had a terrible nightmare.”

“Don’t worry, son, the nightmare is over. You are safe now.”

THE END

GONZO PULP PUBLICATIONS  
PRESENT



[Return to Contents](#)

## WHITE DEW by Rob Bliss

Airplanes flying impossibly high leave long trails of vapour that hold like slow-healing scars across the blue heavens. It usually takes all day for the thin lines to waft lower and lower, spreading out and thinning until their straight-razor edges become serrated snakes of mist. By twilight, only the smallest smears of old cloud tell where the lines once floated.

By then, anyone who ever looked up that day (and so few people ever have reason to look up, too much on the surface distracting them, giving their lives purpose) has forgotten the streaks of smoke and the tiny airplanes so high that if there had been no vapour trails they wouldn't ever know that the planes had passed overhead.

One, of course, wonders how many planes pass over daily, weekly, monthly, leaving no trace of themselves. And where are they going, who knows they're there, and what are they leaving in their wakes?

Few have put together cause and effect, but I see how what goes on above has its reflection on what occurs below. The gods are ever in control, no matter how much we earth-bound mortals are sure that we and we alone are in control of our lives. And there are many gods, always controlled by a single, all-powerful mad deity.

As the smoke falls and baptizes us all, only some will feel its effects. Those already unstable, half reaching for the knife, hearing voices from the television tuned to static, the unplugged radio telling them certain precise truths. The rest of us may merely feel a sudden headache, apropos of nothing; but a spill of pills in the palm takes care of that before the morning alarm clock and rush hour and smog and the incessant demands on our time and attention.

At different points during the day, if we glance away from our work to see how other people fare in the busy, overcrowded world, we may receive word of catastrophes and obscenities. And pray our thanks to some neon god or guru that it has all happened to someone else.

So.

A nanny cuts off the head of the five-year-old girl she was in charge of, then takes the head and the bloody knife to the subway to horrify and confess to commuters. This in St. Petersburg, thin white trails arching high over Mother Russia. In Bangladesh, a mob hacks apart a gay man with machetes and the police arrest two men for insulting Islam on their Facebook page. In San Diego, a woman drowns her twin infants in a pond, then buys two kittens from a pet store and sits on a park bench to suckle them from her breasts. In Oslo, an old man intentionally trips his wife in her slippers, and instead of helping her to her feet, grabs a claw hammer from his toolbox and brains her in her curlers. In Chicago, a police officer points his loaded gun at what he perceives is a threat to himself and to the public: a three-year-old child.

Suicide bombers increase. A nation that won't declare its apartheid releases a flood of news items about the enemy within its borders—children, some of them—taking up rocks and wielding Molotov cocktails to attack innocent soldiers who were forced beyond their will to kill

in retaliation. Thousands of people worldwide were told they had incurable cancer—some were perfectly healthy a month prior, but that was before the white dew had fallen. Hundreds of children instantly got leukaemia. In Third World nations (which were their own blame for tragedies) gangs killed each other and the innocent, and drugs were blamed, though no drugs were found. Police lied on the witness stand and those guilty of lesser crimes faced the death penalty. Terrorists bombed the righteous and the righteous bombed terrorists. And the innocent were killed by both. More people had diabetes than ever before in the history of Mankind—a slow killer that required regular medicine that increased in cost, pharmaceutical companies recording record sales figures every quarter. Insulin was the diabetic's lifetime debt, that could never be paid off.

A madman became president in a First World country, and no one noticed the type of salute they were instinctively giving him.

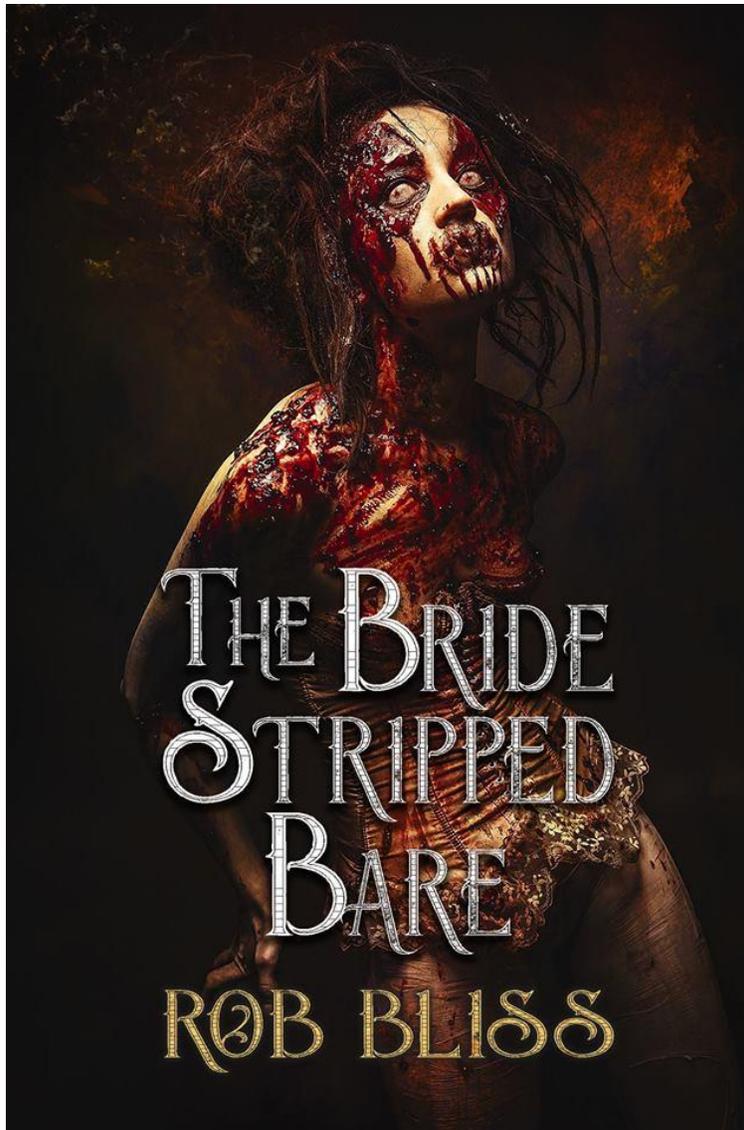
New laws were passed whereby a person could be charged with a crime which they hadn't committed, but which police felt they might commit at a future date. Science fiction became the law. Freedom of speech was no longer a defence in any court—because it was too broadly defined and laws needed narrow parameters in order to be laws.

A dog bit its master in the thigh, and the drunken master fell asleep and died. The dog locked in the house, ate its master and drank his blood and urine, staying alive long enough until a postal carrier finally noticed the smell. The emaciated and sick dog had to be put down, naturally.

The vapour trails continued to stitch across the sky, even after the news had died down. And very few, except the truly paranoid, ever looked up.

THE END

Coming soon from Necro Publications:



[Return to Contents](#)

## THE SEARCH FOR ASTRA PALACE by Gregory KH Bryant

### Part Fifty

The searing beam of a laser blast shrieked past Ward's ear. Ward threw himself back against the cage, only to find the wires of the cage becoming red hot.

Ward pushed himself away with a disgusted grunt.

"Gaw-dammit!" he muttered.

Lacey was no less discomfited. Everything she touched burned her. Her long blonde tresses were singed in a dozen places, filling the cages with the thick stench of charred hair.

"Oh!" she cried out.

Another blast shot through the cage, very nearly cutting through Lacey and Ward. Ward pushed Lacey back. He glared into the cages. They were lined up in such a way as to make a series of tunnels. Flames leaped out from them, blue, wiry bolts of electricity shot along the length of them. Steam scalded the air.

Ward studied the tunnels and cages. He didn't like what he was seeing.

Another bolt of a laser blast shot past his abdomen, searing a harsh wound across his belly. Ward looked back toward the opening of the tunnel, just in time to catch a glimpse of a human hand gripping a pistol as it jerked out of sight.

"Uh-huh. Gonna getcha, bitch," Ward thought silently to himself.

And sure enough, just as Ward expected, the hand grasping the pistol appeared once again. Ward saw that whoever was holding the pistol was shooting blindly. Good. Taught the bastards some respect.

Ward, on the other hand, was not shooting blindly. He swung his pistol in a long chopping motion, neatly slicing hand from wrist. A howl of pain filled the playing field. The hand, still gripping the pistol, bounced away from the wrist, still firing away, as the finger gripped the trigger of the laser pistol. A burning laser came screaming and spiralling from the pistol, hot crimson beams slicing through flesh and fabric alike.

"Carter!" Lacey called to him, grabbing his wrist.

"What? What is it?" he demanded.

Lacey pointed down the narrow, uncomfortable tunnel. She pointed at a laser rifle tied with wire to the cage.

“Don’t touch it,” Ward warned.

“No?” Lacey asked.

“Prob’ly wired,” Ward said. “Check it out first.”

A purple beam shot in the air between their faces.

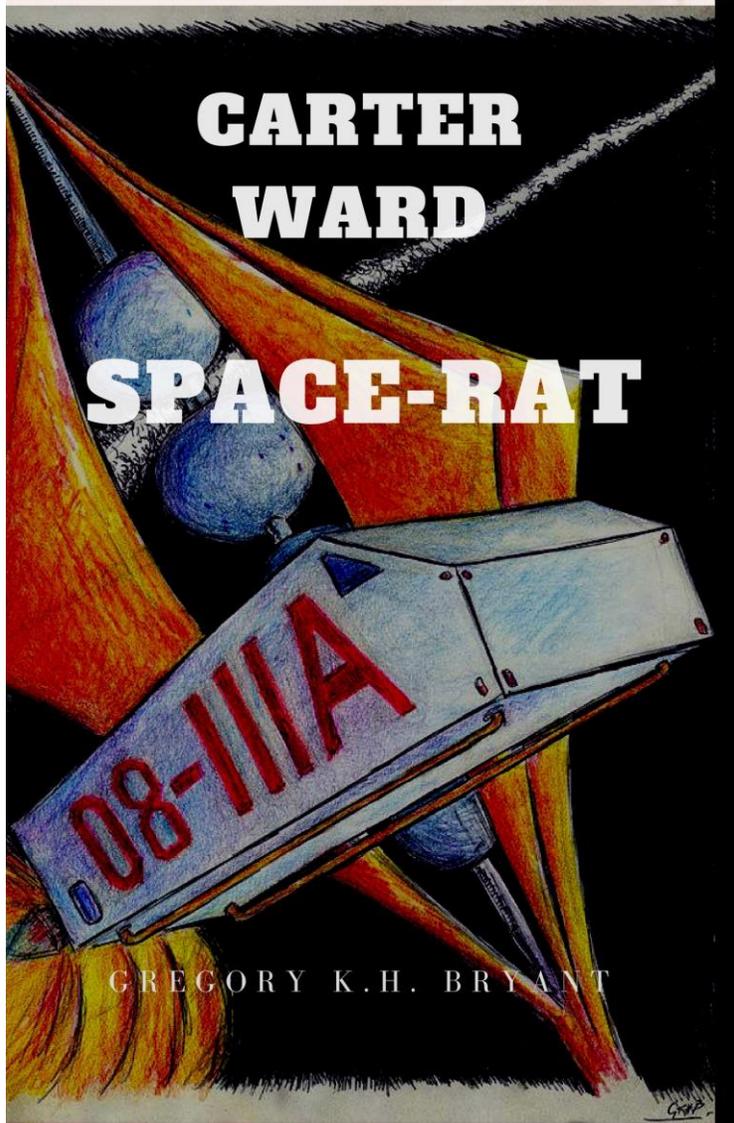
“Dammit!” Ward spat. He turned in the direction of the shot. A dozen blasts came at Lacey and Ward. Ward was hit several times, in the arms, the chest and the legs. Lacey stopped a shot or two herself.

“Hell,” Ward cursed. “C’mon, then,” he said to Lacey, pulling her by the wrist. He didn’t like the look of the rusted wire cages that made up the tunnel ahead. But he didn’t see any other way out.

Dragging Lacey behind him he plunged into the rusted shadows.

CONTINUES NEXT ISSUE

Now available from Schlock! Publications: *Carter Ward—Space Rat* by Gregory KH Bryant.



[Return to Contents](#)

ERIC BRIGHTEYES by H Rider Haggard

## X. How Asmund Spoke With Swanhild

Now as the days went, though Atli's ship was bound for sea, she did not sail, and it came about that the Earl sank ever deeper in the toils of Swanhild. He called to mind many wise saws, but these availed him little: for when Love rises like the sun, wisdom melts like the mists. So at length it came to this, that on the day of Eric's coming back, Atli went to Asmund the Priest, and asked him for the hand of Swanhild the Fatherless in marriage. Asmund heard and was glad, for he knew well that things went badly between Swanhild and Gudruda, and it seemed good to him that seas should be set between them. Nevertheless, he thought it honest to warn the Earl that Swanhild was apart from other women.

"Thou dost great honour, earl, to my foster-daughter and my house," he said. "Still, it behoves me to move gently in this matter. Swanhild is fair, and she shall not go hence a wife undowered. But I must tell thee this: that her ways are dark and secret, and strange and fiery are her moods, and I think that she will bring evil on the man who weds her. Now, I love thee, Atli, were it only for our youth's sake, and thou art not altogether fit to mate with such a maid, for age has met thee on thy way. For, as thou wouldst say, youth draws to youth as the tide to the shore, and falls away from eld as the wave from the rock. Think, then: is it well that thou shouldst take her, Atli?"

"I have thought much and overmuch," answered the Earl, stroking his grey beard; "but ships old and new drive before a gale."

"Ay, Atli, and the new ship rides, where the old one founders."

"A true rede, a heavy rede, Asmund; yet I am minded to sail this sea, and, if it sink me—well, I have known fair weather! Great longing has got hold of me, and I think the maid looks gently on me, and that things may yet go well between us. I have many things to give such as women love. At the least, if thou givest me thy good word, I will risk it, Asmund: for the bold thrower sometimes wins the stake. Only I say this, that, if Swanhild is unwilling, let there be an end of my wooing, for I do not wish to take a bride who turns from my grey hairs."

Asmund said that it should be so, and they made an end of talking just as the light faded.

Now Asmund went out seeking Swanhild, and presently he met her near the stead. He could not see her face, and that was well, for it was not good to look on, but her mien was wondrous wild.

"Where hast thou been, Swanhild?" he asked.

"Mourning Eric Brighteyes," she made answer.

"It is meeter for Gudruda to mourn over Eric than for thee, for her loss is heavy," Asmund said sternly. "What hast thou to do with Eric?"

“Little, or much; or all—read it as thou wilt, foster-father. Still, all wept for are not lost, nor all who are lost wept for.”

“Little do I know of thy dark reds,” said Asmund. “Where is Gudruda now?”

“High is she or low, sleeping or perchance awakened: naught reck I. She also mourned for Eric, and we went nigh to mingling tears—near together were brown curls and golden,” and she laughed aloud.

“Thou art surely fey, thou evil girl!” said Asmund.

“Ay, foster-father, fey: yet is this but the first of my feydom. Here starts the road that I must travel, and my feet shall be red ere the journey’s done.”

“Leave thy dark talk,” said Asmund, “for to me it is as the wind’s song, and listen: a good thing has befallen thee—ay, good beyond thy deserving.”

“Is it so? Well, I stand greatly in need of good. What is thy tidings, foster-father?”

“This: Atli the Earl asks thee in marriage, and he is a mighty man, well honoured in his own land, and set higher, moreover, than I had looked for thee.”

“Ay,” answered Swanhild, “set like the snow above the fells, set in the years that long are dead. Nay, foster-father, this white-bearded dotard is no mate for me. What! shall I mix my fire with his frost, my breathing youth with the creeping palsy of his age? Never! If Swanhild weds she weds not so, for it is better to go maiden to the grave than thus to shrink and wither at the touch of eld. Now is Atli’s wooing sped, and there’s an end.”

Asmund heard and grew wroth, for the matter seemed strange to him; nor are maidens wont thus to put aside the word of those set over them.

“There is no end,” he said; “I will not be answered thus by a girl who lives upon my bounty. It is my rede that thou weddest Atli, or else thou goest hence. I have loved thee, and for that love’s sake I have borne thy wickedness, thy dark secret ways, and evil words; but I will be crossed no more by thee, Swanhild.”

“Thou wouldst drive me hence with Groa my mother, though perchance thou hast yet more reason to hold me dear, foster-father. Fear not: I will go—perhaps further than thou thinkest,” and once more Swanhild laughed, and passed from him into the darkness.

But Asmund stood looking after her. “Truly,” he said in his heart, “ill deeds are arrows that pierce him who shot them. I have sowed evilly, and now I reap the harvest. What means she with her talk of Gudruda and the rest?”

Now as he thought, he saw men and horses draw near, and one man, whose helm gleamed in the moonlight, bore something in his arms.

“Who passes?” he called.

“Eric Brighteyes, Skallagrim Lambstail, and Gudruda, Asmund’s daughter,” answered a voice; “who art thou?”

Then Asmund the Priest sprang forward, most glad at heart, for he never thought to see Eric again.

“Welcome, and thrice welcome art thou, Eric,” he cried; “for, know, we deemed thee dead.”

“I have lately gone near to death, lord,” said Eric, for he knew the voice; “but I am hale and whole, though somewhat weary.”

“What has come to pass, then?” asked Asmund, “and why holdest thou Gudruda in thy arms? Is the maid dead?”

“Nay, she does but swoon. See, even now she stirs,” and as he spake Gudruda awoke, shuddering, and with a little cry threw her arms about the neck of Eric.

He set her down and comforted her, then once more turned to Asmund:

“Three things have come about,” he said. “First, I have slain one Baresark, and won another to be my thrall, and for him I crave thy peace, for he has served me well. Next, we two were set upon by Ospakar Blacktooth and his fellowship, and, fighting for our hands, have wounded Ospakar, slain Mord his son, and six other men of his following.”

“That is good news and bad,” said Asmund, “since Ospakar will ask a great weregild [<sup>1</sup>] for these men, and thou wilt be outlawed, Eric.”

“That may happen, lord. There is time enough to think of it. Now there are other tidings to tell. Coming to the head of Goldfoss I found Gudruda, my betrothed, mourning my death, and spoke with her. Afterwards I left her, and presently returned again, to see her hanging over the gulf, and Swanhild hurling rocks upon her to crush her.”

“These are tidings in truth,” said Asmund—“such tidings as my heart feared! Is this true, Gudruda?”

“It is true, my father,” answered Gudruda, trembling. “As I sat on the brink of Goldfoss, Swanhild crept behind me and thrust me into the gulf. There I clung above the waters, and she brought a rock to hurl upon me, when suddenly I saw Eric’s face, and after that my mind left me and I can tell no more.”

Now Asmund grew as one mad. He plucked at his beard and stamped on the ground. “Maid

---

<sup>1</sup> The penalty for manslaying.

though she be,” he cried, “yet shall Swanhild’s back be broken on the Stone of Doom for a witch and a murderess, and her body hurled into the pool of faithless women, and the earth will be well rid of her!”

Now Gudruda looked up and smiled: “It would be ill to wreak such a vengeance on her, father,” she said; “and this would also bring the greatest shame on thee, and all our house. I am saved, by the mercy of the Gods and the might of Eric’s arm, and this is my counsel: that nothing be told of this tale, but that Swanhild be sent away where she can harm us no more.”

“She must be sent to the grave, then,” said Asmund, and fell to thinking. Presently he spoke again: “Bid yon man fall back, I would speak with you twain,” and Skallagrim went grumbling.

“Hearken now, Eric and Gudruda: only an hour ago hath Atli the Good asked Swanhild of me in marriage. But now I met Swanhild here, and her mien was wild. Still, I spoke of the matter to her, and she would have none of it. Now, this is my counsel: that choice be given to Swanhild, either that she go hence Atli’s wife, or take her trial in the Doom-ring.”

“That will be bad for the Earl then,” said Eric. “Methinks he is too good a man to be played on thus.”

“Bairn first, then friend,” answered Asmund.

“Now I will tell thee something that, till this hour, I have hidden from all, for it is my shame. This Swanhild is my daughter, and therefore I have loved her and put away her evil deeds, and she is half-sister to thee, Gudruda. See, then, how sore is my straight, who must avenge daughter upon daughter.”

“Knows thy son Björn of this?” asked Eric.

“None knew it till this hour, except Groa and I.”

“Yet I have feared it long, father,” said Gudruda, “and therefore I have also borne with Swanhild, though she hates me much and has striven hard to draw my betrothed from me. Now thou canst only take one counsel, and it is: to give choice to Swanhild of these two things, though it is unworthy that Atli should be deceived, and at the best little good can come of it.”

“Yet it must be done, for honour is often slain of heavy need,” said Asmund. “But we must first swear this Baresark thrall of thine, though little faith lives in Baresark’s breast.”

Now Eric called to Skallagrim and charged him strictly that he should tell nothing of Swanhild, and of the wolf that he saw by her, and of how Gudruda was found hanging over the gulf.

“Fear not,” growled the Baresark, “my tongue is now my master’s. What is it to me if women do their wickedness one on another? Let them work magic, hate and slay by stealth, so shall evil be lessened in the world.”

“Peace!” said Eric; “if anything of this passes thy lips thou art no longer a thrall of mine, and I give thee up to the men of thy quarter.”

“And I cleave that wolf’s head of thine down to thy hawk’s eyes; but, otherwise, I give thee peace, and will hold thee from harm, wood-dweller as thou art,” said Asmund.

The Baresark laughed: “My hands will hold my head against ten such mannikins as thou art, Priest. There was never but one man who might overcome me in fair fight and there he stands, and his bidding is my law. So waste no words and make not niddering threats against greater folk,” and he slouched back to his horse.

“A mighty man and a rough,” said Asmund, looking after him; “I like his looks little.”

“Natheless a strong in battle,” quoth Eric; “had he not been at my back some six hours gone, by now the ravens had torn out these eyes of mine. Therefore, for my sake, bear with him.”

Asmund said it should be so, and then they passed on to the stead.

Here Eric stripped off his harness, washed, and bound up his wounds. Then, followed by Skallagrim, axe in hand, he came into the hall as men made ready to sit at meat. Now the tale of the mighty deeds that he had done, except that of the saving of Gudruda, had gone abroad, and as Brighteyes came all men rose and with one voice shouted till the roof of the great hall rocked:

“Welcome, Eric Brighteyes, thou glory of the south!”

Only Björn, Asmund’s son, bit his hand, and did not shout, for he hated Eric because of the fame that he had won.

Brighteyes stood still till the clamour died, then said:

“Much noise for little deeds, brethren. It is true that I overthrew the Mosfell Baresarks. See, here is one,” and he turned to Skallagrim; “I strangled him in my arms on Mosfell’s brink, and that was something of a deed. Then he swore fealty to me, and we are blood-brethren now, and therefore I ask peace for him, comrades—even from those whom he has wronged or whose kin he has slain. I know this, that when thereafter we stood back to back and met the company of Ospakar Blacktooth, who came to slay us—ay, and Asmund also, and bear away Gudruda to be his wife—he warred right gallantly, till seven of their band lay stiff on Horse-Head Heights, overthrown of us, and among them Mord, Blacktooth’s son; and Ospakar himself went thence sore smitten of this Skallagrim. Therefore, for my sake, do no harm to this man who was Baresark, but now is my thrall; and, moreover, I beg the aid and friendship of all men of this quarter in those suits that will be laid against me at the Althing for these slayings, which I hereby give out as done by my hand, and by the hand of Skallagrim Lambstail, the Baresark.”

At these words all men shouted again; but Atli the Earl sprang from the high seat where Asmund had placed him, and, coming to Eric, kissed him, and, drawing a gold chain from his neck, flung it about the neck of Eric, crying:

“Thou art a glorious man, Eric Brighteyes. I thought the world had no more of such a breed. Listen to my bidding: come thou to the earldom in Orkneys and be a son to me, and I will give thee all good gifts, and, when I die, thou shalt sit in my seat after me.”

But Eric thought of Swanhild, who must go from Iceland as wife to Atli, and answered:

“Thou doest me great honour, Earl, but this may not be. Where the fir is planted, there it must grow and fall. Iceland I love, and I will stay here among my own people till I am driven away.”

“That may well happen, then,” said Atli, “for be sure Ospakar and his kin will not let the matter of these slayings rest, and I think that it will not avail thee much that thou smotest for thine own hand. Then, come thou and be my man.”

“Where the Norns lead there I must follow,” said Eric, and sat down to meat. Skallagrim sat down also at the side-bench; but men shrank from him, and he glowered on them in answer.

Presently Gudruda entered, and she seemed pale and faint.

When he had done eating, Eric drew Gudruda on to his knee, and she sat there, resting her golden head upon his breast. But Swanhild did not come into the hall, though ever Earl Atli sought her dark face and lovely eyes of blue, and he wondered greatly how his wooing had sped. Still, at this time he spoke no more of it to Asmund.

Now Skallagrim drank much ale, and glared about him fiercely; for he had this fault, that at times he was drunken. In front of him were two thralls of Asmund’s; they were brothers, and large-made men, and they watched Asmund’s sheep upon the fells in winter. These two also grew drunk and jeered at Skallagrim, asking him what atonement he would make for those ewes of Asmund’s that he had stolen last Yule, and how it came to pass that he, a Baresark, had been overthrown of an unarmed man.

Skallagrim bore their gibes for a space as he drank on, but suddenly he rose and rushed at them, and, seizing a man’s throat in either hand, thrust them to the ground beneath him and nearly choked them there.

Then Eric ran down the hall, and, putting out his strength, tore the Baresark from them.

“This then is thy peacefulness, thou wolf!” Eric cried. “Thou art drunk!”

“Ay,” growled Skallagrim, “ale is many a man’s doom.”

“Have a care that it is not thine and mine, then!” said Eric. “Go, sleep; and know that, if I see thee thus once more, I see thee not again.”

But after this men jeered no more at Skallagrim Lambstail, Eric’s thrall.

CONTINUES NEXT ISSUE  
[Return to Contents](#)

## THE MOON POOL by A Merritt

### Chapter XXX: The Building of the Moon Pool

She paused, running her long fingers through her own bronze-flecked ringlets. Selective breeding this, with a vengeance, I thought; an ancient experiment in heredity which of course would in time result in the stamping out of the tendency to depart from type that lies in all organisms; resulting, obviously, at last, in three fixed forms of black-haired, ruddy-haired, and silver-haired—but this, with a shock of realization it came to me, was also an accurate description of the dark-pollled ladala, their fair-haired rulers and of the golden-brown tressed Lakla!

How—questions began to stream through my mind; silenced by the handmaiden's voice.

“Above, far, far above the abode of the Shining One,” she said, “was their greatest temple, holding the shrines both of sun and moon. All about it were other temples hidden behind mighty walls, each enclosing its own space and squared and ruled and standing within a shallow lake; the sacred city, the city of the gods of this land—”

“It is the Nan-Matal that she is describing,” I thought.

“Out upon all this looked the Taithu who were now but the servants of the Shining One as it had been the messenger of the Three,” she went on. “When they returned the Shining One spoke to them, promising them dominion over all that they had seen, yea, under its dominion of all earth itself and later perhaps of other earths!

“In the Shining One had grown craft, cunning; knowledge to gain that which it desired. Therefore it told its Taithu—and mayhap told them truth—that not yet was it time for them to go forth; that slowly must they pass into that outer world, for they had sprung from heart of earth and even it lacked power to swirl unaided into and through the above. Then it counselled them, instructing them what to do. They hollowed the chamber wherein first I saw you, cutting their way to it that path down which from it you sped.

“It revealed to them that the force that is within moon flame is kin to the force that is within it, for the chamber of its birth was the chamber too of moon birth and into it went the subtle essence and powers that flow in that earth child: and it taught them how to make that which fills what you call the Moon Pool whose opening is close behind its Veil hanging upon the gleaming cliffs.

“When this was done it taught them how to make and how to place the seven lights through which moon flame streams into Moon Pool—the seven lights that are kin to its own seven orbs even as its fires are kin to moon fires—and which would open for it a path that it could tread. And all this the Taithu did, working so secretly that neither those of their race whose faces were set against the Shining One nor the busy men above know aught of it.

“When it was done they moved up the path, clustering within the Moon Pool Chamber. Moon flame streamed through the seven globes, poured down upon the pool; they saw mists arise, embrace, and become one with the moon flame—and then up through Moon Pool, shaping itself

within the mists of light, whirling, radiant—the Shining One!

“Almost free, almost loosed upon the world it coveted!

“Again it counselled them, and they pierced the passage whose portal you found first; set the fires within its stones, and revealing themselves to the moon king and his priests spake to them even as the Shining One had instructed.

“Now was the moon king filled with fear when he looked upon the Taithu, shrouded with protecting mists of light in Moon Pool Chamber, and heard their words. Yet, being crafty, he thought of the power that would be his if he heeded and how quickly the strength of the sun king would dwindle. So he and his made a pact with the Shining One’s messengers.

“When next the moon was round and poured its flames down upon Moon Pool, the Taithu gathered there again, watched the child of the Three take shape within the pillars, speed away—and out! They heard a mighty shouting, a tumult of terror, of awe and of worship; a silence; a vast sighing—and they waited, wrapped in their mists of light, for they feared to follow nor were they near the paths that would have enabled them to look without.

“Another tumult—and back came the Shining One, murmuring with joy, pulsing, triumphant, and clasped within its vapours a man and woman, ruddy-haired, golden-eyed, in whose faces rapture and horror lay side by side—gloriously, hideously. And still holding them it danced above the Moon Pool and—sank!

“Now must I be brief. Lat after lat the Shining One went forth, returning with its sacrifices. And stronger after each it grew—and gayer and more cruel. Ever when it passed with its prey toward the pool, the Taithu who watched felt a swift, strong intoxication, a drunkenness of spirit, streaming from it to them. And the Shining One forgot what it had promised them of dominion—and in this new evil delight they too forgot.

“The outer land was torn with hatred and open strife. The moon king and his kind, through the guidance of the evil Taithu and the favour of the Shining One, had become powerful and the sun king and his were darkened. And the moon priests preached that the child of the Three was the moon god itself come to dwell with them.

“Now vast tides arose and when they withdrew they took with them great portions of this country. And the land itself began to sink. Then said the moon king that the moon had called to ocean to destroy because wroth that another than he was worshipped. The people believed and there was slaughter. When it was over there was no more a sun king nor any of the ruddy-haired folk; slain were they, slain down to the babe at breast.

“But still the tides swept higher; still dwindled the land!

“As it shrank multitudes of the fleeing people were led through Moon Pool Chamber and carried here. They were what now are called the ladala, and they were given place and set to work; and they thrived. Came many of the fair-haired; and they were given dwellings. They sat beside the

evil Taithu; they became drunk even as they with the dancing of the Shining One; they learned—not all; only a little part but little enough—of their arts. And ever the Shining One danced more gaily out there within the black amphitheatre; grew ever stronger—and ever the hordes of its slaves behind the Veil increased.

“Nor did the Taithu who clung to the old ways check this—they could not. By the sinking of the land above, their own spaces were imperilled. All of their strength and all of their wisdom it took to keep this land from perishing; nor had they help from those others mad for the poison of the Shining One; and they had no time to deal with them nor the earth race with whom they had foregathered.

“At last came a slow, vast flood. It rolled even to the bases of the walled islets of the city of the gods—and within these now were all that were left of my people on earth face.

“I am of those people,” she paused, looking at me proudly, “one of the daughters of the sun king whose seed is still alive in the ladala!”

As Larry opened his mouth to speak she waved a silencing hand.

“This tide did not recede,” she went on. “And after a time the remnant, the moon king leading them, joined those who had already fled below. The rocks became still, the quakings ceased, and now those Ancient Ones who had been labouring could take breath. And anger grew within them as they looked upon the work of their evil kin. Again they sought the Three—and the Three now knew what they had done and their pride was humbled. They would not slay the Shining One themselves, for still they loved it; but they instructed these others how to undo their work; how also they might destroy the evil Taithu were it necessary.

“Armed with the wisdom of the Three they went forth—but now the Shining One was strong indeed. They could not slay it!

“Nay, it knew and was prepared; they could not even pass beyond its Veil nor seal its abode. Ah, strong, strong, mighty of will, full of craft and cunning had the Shining One become. So they turned upon their kind who had gone astray and made them perish, to the last. The Shining One came not to the aid of its servants—though they called; for within its will was the thought that they were of no further use to it; that it would rest awhile and dance with them—who had so little of the power and wisdom of its Taithu and therefore no reins upon it. And while this was happening black-haired and fair-haired ran and hid and were but shaking vessels of terror.

“The Ancient Ones took counsel. This was their decision; that they would go from the gardens before the Silver Waters—leaving, since they could not kill it, the Shining One with its worshippers. They sealed the mouth of the passage that leads to the Moon Pool Chamber and they changed the face of the cliff so that none might tell where it had been. But the passage itself they left open—having foreknowledge I think, of a thing that was to come to pass in the far future—perhaps it was your journey here, my Larry and Goodwin—verily I think so. And they destroyed all the ways save that which we three trod to the Dweller’s abode.

“For the last time they went to the Three—to pass sentence upon them. This was the doom—that here they should remain, alone, among the Akka, served by them, until that time dawned when they would have will to destroy the evil they had created—and even now—loved; nor might they seek death, nor follow their judges until this had come to pass. This was the doom they put upon the Three for the wickedness that had sprung from their pride, and they strengthened it with their arts that it might not be broken.

“Then they passed—to a far land they had chosen where the Shining One could not go, beyond the Black Precipices of DouL, a green land—”

“Ireland!” interrupted Larry, with conviction, “I knew it.”

“Since then time upon time had passed,” she went on, unheeding. “The people called this place Muria after their sunken land and soon they forgot where had been the passage the Taithu had sealed. The moon king became the Voice of the Dweller and always with the Voice is a woman of the moon king’s kin who is its priestess.

“And many have been the journeys upward of the Shining One, through the Moon Pool—returning with still others in its coils.

“And now again has it grown restless, longing for the wider spaces. It has spoken to Yolara and to Lugur even as it did to the dead Taithu, promising them dominion. And it has grown stronger, drawing to itself power to go far on the moon stream where it will. Thus was it able to seize your friend, Goodwin, and Olaf’s wife and babe—and many more. Yolara and Lugur plan to open way to earth face; to depart with their court and under the Shining One grasp the world!

“And this is the tale the Silent Ones bade me tell you—and it is done.”

Breathlessly I had listened to the stupendous epic of a long-lost world. Now I found speech to voice the question ever with me, the thing that lay as close to my heart as did the welfare of Larry, indeed the whole object of my quest—the fate of Throckmartin and those who had passed with him into the Dweller’s lair; yes, and of Olaf’s wife, too.

“Lakla,” I said, “the friend who drew me here and those he loved who went before him—can we not save them?”

“The Three say no, Goodwin.” There was again in her eyes the pity with which she had looked upon Olaf. “The Shining One—feeds—upon the flame of life itself, setting in its place its own fires and its own will. Its slaves are only shells through which it gleams. Death, say the Three, is the best that can come to them; yet will that be a boon great indeed.”

“But they have souls, mavourneen,” Larry said to her. “And they’re alive still—in a way. Anyhow, their souls have not gone from them.”

I caught a hope from his words—sceptic though I am—holding that the existence of soul has never been proved by dependable laboratory methods—for they recalled to me that when I had

seen Throckmartin, Edith had been close beside him.

“It was days after his wife was taken, that the Dweller seized Throckmartin,” I cried. “How, if their wills, their life, were indeed gone, how did they find each other mid all that horde? How did they come together in the Dweller’s lair?”

“I do not know,” she answered, slowly. “You say they loved—and it is true that love is stronger even than death!”

“One thing I don’t understand”—this was Larry again—“is why a girl like you keeps coming out of the black-haired crowd; so frequently and one might say, so regularly, Lakla. Aren’t there ever any red-headed boys—and if they are what becomes of them?”

“That, Larry, I cannot answer,” she said, very frankly. “There was a pact of some kind; how made or by whom I know not. But for long the Murians feared the return of the Taithu and greatly they feared the Three. Even the Shining One feared those who had created it—for a time; and not even now is it eager to face them—that I know. Nor are Yolara and Lugur so sure. It may be that the Three commanded it: but how or why I know not. I only know that it is true—for here am I and from where else would I have come?”

“From Ireland,” said Larry O’Keefe, promptly. “And that’s where you’re going. For ‘tis no place for a girl like you to have been brought up—Lakla; what with people like frogs, and a half-god three quarters devil, and red oceans, an’ the only Irish things yourself and the Silent Ones up there, bless their hearts. It’s no place for ye, and by the soul of St. Patrick, it’s out of it soon ye’ll be gettin’!”

Larry! Larry! If it had but been true—and I could see Lakla and you beside me now!

CONTINUES NEXT ISSUE

[Return to Contents](#)