

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

Schlock!

WEBZINE

**VOL. 12, ISSUE 5
15TH OCTOBER 2017**

RESURRECTION

**BY DAVE LUDFORD
— THE SONOROUS
CLANGING OF A
BELL...**

ARE FRIENDS EMOJIS?

**BY STEVE LAKER
— WITH NO
VISIBLE MEANS
OF EXIT...**

THE DEMONS BY STEVEN HAVELOCK

WARRIORS OF HEL

BY MATHIAS JANSSON

WWW.SCHLOCK.CO.UK

SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

Edited by
Gavin Chappell

PUBLISHED BY:
Schlock! Publications
(www.schlock.co.uk)

Schlock! Webzine
*Copyright © 2017 by Gavin Chappell, C Priest Brumley, Steve Laker, Dave Ludford,
Gregory KH Bryant, Saki, HP Lovecraft, Jules Verne, Mathias Jansson*

SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

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

Vol. 12, Issue 5
15th October 2017

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. 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 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 "Hermod before Hela" (1909) by [John Charles Dollman](#). All images within licensed under Creative Commons Attribution Share Alike 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons, unless otherwise indicated. Graphic design © by Gavin Chappell, logo design © by C Priest Brumley.

[EDITORIAL](#)

[RESURRECTION](#) by Dave Ludford— *The sonorous clanging of a bell...* HORROR

[ARE FRIENDS EMOJIS?](#) by Steve Laker— *With no visible means of exit...* SCIENCE FICTION

[THE DEMONS](#) by Steven Havelock— *Alan stared at the needle he was holding...* HORROR

[WARRIORS OF HEL](#) by Mathias Jansson— *Ghostly shadows...* POETRY

[SUPERNATURAL HORROR IN LITERATURE](#) by HP Lovecraft— *The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear...* ARTICLE

[GABRIEL-EARNEST](#) by Saki— *There is a wild beast in your woods...* FANTASY

[THE BATTLE FOR CALLISTO](#) Episode Twenty-Eight by Gregory KH Bryant— *What's it looking like down there?* SCIENCE FICTION

[THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND](#) Part Three: Chapter Fourteen by Jules Verne— *Smoke from the crater...* SCIENCE FICTION CLASSIC

[ROGUE PLANET PRESS SUBMISSIONS CALL](#)

EDITORIAL

This week, Sadeyes returns. A talking computer deconstructs reality. Alan tries to escape his demons. And Sote speaks the magic runes of Odin.

We begin serialising HP Lovecraft's landmark essay, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*. Also up is a classic tale of wildness in the English countryside from Saki. The Battle for Callisto is nearing its climax. And the colonists on Lincoln Island begin work on another boat.

—Gavin Chappell

Now Available from Rogue Planet Press:

[Hammer of the Gods II: Ragnarok](#)



[Return to Contents](#)

RESURRECTION by Dave Ludford

The sonorous clanging of a bell in the heavy gloom of the early morning hours wakes you from a fitful sleep during which you had once again been dreaming of Sarah Bramwell. Guilt revisiting you. Perhaps the bell was part of the dream, too, sounding clear and cold, like a judgement. The geography of this area is unfamiliar but you didn't notice any churches on your journey to this lonely, desolate place. So, part of the dream it must have been. You throw back the twisted sweat-saturated bed sheets and stumble awkwardly to standing, disorientated and fuzzy-headed from a mild hangover. Walk unsteadily to the un-curtained window and look out at a grey-white world of thick snow illuminated by the hesitant, uncertain light of a moon that stares like a huge, unblinking eye.

Mid-morning you are trudging through virgin snow in boots lined and cracked with age, huddled stiffly inside a woollen coat that only just manages to keep out the harsh cold. Ruddy cheeks and vaporous breath that snakes upward, forming the clouds, you think fancifully, that lumber across a pristine blue sky, swollen and pregnant with more snow. The landscape, as far as you can see, is covered with a heavy white blanket that deflects the impossibly bright sunlight, dazzling you. You left the cottage unable to bear the silence any longer but here the silence is absolute, everything slumbering or dead beneath the numbing cold of its winter covering.

A mile further on another cottage comes into view, built of limestone brick the same as the one you have left, your temporary refuge. No obvious signs of life: no smoke from the chimney or anyone engaged in clearing snow from the front door to the track down which you walk. Dare you risk an encounter with other people, even in this remote area hundreds of miles from where you once lived but where your crime may still be known of? Better to walk on, surely; or, better still, turn back and retrace your steps homeward. But the cottage draws you inexorably onward, pulling you trance-like towards it, you seemingly unable to resist its silent beckoning.

It is when you are a hundred metres or so away, no longer feeling in control of your body that a figure emerges from the front door. Female: early sixties you guess, steel-grey hair pulled tightly back, looking ridiculously small and lost buried inside a thick padded anorak. Attractive: face hardly lined, a careful and subtle application of make-up and lipstick. But it is her eyes that you notice as you get even nearer; intense, but with a faraway look of world-weary sadness. She is softly humming a tune: Onward Christian Soldiers. Now, merely feet away from her, she stops humming, a broad smile spreading across her face. She speaks, her voice quiet but strong, assertive.

“Ah, Mr Jansen. Please come in. I've been expecting you.”

The words send shivers down your spine. She nods her head several times in satisfaction, then suddenly turns and walks back inside the cottage with no further utterance.

You follow her, meekly, powerless to do otherwise.

“Now do please settle yourself, Mr Jansen,” she says, indicating an ancient but comfortable-looking armchair. Make yourself at home, as the cliché has it.”

Once more you obey. She seats herself in a similar armchair opposite you. Your eyes scan the small room but fail to register any details as thoughts crash through your mind. How does this woman know my name? How could she be expecting me? Why am I powerless to resist her will? This is ridiculous, too bizarre for words. You shake your head as if to dislodge the thoughts.

“Now I do so hope that you are in the mood for a little chat,” she continues, leaning forward with both hands clasped in her lap. “It gets so lonely up here, miles away from anywhere. So remote, no other cottages for miles. But I think...in fact I know, Mr Jansen that this is why you chose this location as your place of refuge. You are on the run, aren’t you Mr...can I call you Ray by the way? On the run from some terrible crime that you’ve committed. Why don’t you tell me all about it?”

It is a fine but chilly mid-autumn evening, you are on your way to the Strand Hotel in town and your first date with a girl in over six months. You are exhilarated but nervous. Sarah Bramwell, the girl you are meeting, is an old friend; you’ve known her for fifteen years at least. Nothing could possibly go wrong: deep breaths, you’ll be fine. Sarah has recently split up with her long-term boyfriend and is feeling lonely and isolated, in desperate need of comfort and friendship and possibly a shoulder to cry on. The boyfriend had been having an affair with a girl whom Sarah had been happy to call a friend, having no idea or inkling of the deceit she was being subjected to. Only a full, drunken confession from Graham had revealed the level of duplicity. Sarah was angry, of course; but more than that. She felt used, foolish, annoyed with herself for being so stupid. All of this she had explained to you in an hour-long phone conversation two nights ago.

Your stomach lurches and you feel faintly nauseous as you negotiate the crowds of people milling outside cinemas, pubs and theatres. Slow down, you tell yourself, nearly there. You have always fancied Sarah and feel sure that the attraction is mutual; it just never happened between the two of you. And then that arsehole Graham came along. Another opportunity missed. Well, now another opportunity has arisen and you are determined to grab it and never let it go. You turn the corner of Haymarket Street and there it is: The Strand Hotel. You look at your watch and see that you are ten minutes late. Panic sets in. You rush up the hotel’s stone steps and head straight for the restaurant.

She sits at a small table at the back of the room and your chest constricts as you approach her. She is looking more beautiful than you have ever seen her: black evening dress matching her ebony-black, shoulder-length hair which seems tinged with blue beneath the restaurant’s lights. Given how you felt on your way here, and how you feel now, you wonder crazily if love can be detrimental to health. For it is love, you are certain of that. Or what passes for it in your (admittedly limited) experience.

She smiles in greeting as you reach the table, showing perfect white teeth. Her blue eyes twinkle with a mischievous, liquid light. She is swirling a glass of white wine around in her left hand; is holding a menu with her right. The restaurant is full and you are dimly aware of the light clatter of cutlery on plates.

“Sorry I’m late,” you say, taking your seat. “That mad cat of mine insisted on being fed before I came out, and then I couldn’t find the bloody tin opener. Ought to buy the pouches, really.” You blush out how stupid this last remark sounds.

“No worries, Ray, I knew you wouldn’t stand me up.” There is something playful, teasing in her expression. Your heart thuds violently against your chest and it is some moments before you can fully compose yourself. A waiter appears and presents you with a menu which you peruse, baffled. It was Sarah who wanted to come here, it was recommended to her. Not your preferred type of venue, though; pubs with loud music competing for noise with TV’s broadcasting Premiership football games is more your scene. But if this is what Sarah wants, you are happy to respect her choice.

The evening goes well, not that you thought that it wouldn’t. Sarah helped you negotiate the menu in a non-patronizing way and you push away your plate having enjoyed the best steak you have ever tasted; perfectly cooked and mouth-wateringly succulent. The wine and conversation have flowed. There have been no awkward silences. You find talking to Sarah so easy, natural. You are a good listener and pay her constant attention, which you can tell she appreciates. She hardly mentions the Graham situation but is keen to find out how you are getting on in your new job, what your new colleagues are like. By the time the last course has been consumed you are both feeling distinctly tipsy. It is then that she leans toward you, looks you straight in the eyes, and takes one of your hands gently in hers. Says those magical words.

“Ray, I’ve booked a room here.”

A brief statement that explains her mischievous, playful but enigmatic expression that she has maintained all the time you have been here together. Your reply is instant, unequivocal.

“What are we waiting for?”

You are aware that you have a glass of brandy in your hand but have no recollection of how it got there. You take a sip and the red-hot liquid tastes good, comforting as it slips down your throat. The woman who has introduced herself as Sadeyes (what kind of name is that? you remember thinking before embarking on your narrative. She is still seated opposite you; her sorrowful, mournful expression has never wavered. A complete contrast to Sarah’s eyes on that wonderful, but ultimately tragic evening. And then it occurs to you: Sadeyes. It can’t surely be her real name but it perfectly encapsulates her generally despondent mien.

Before you know it, you have drained the brandy and now feel slightly woozy. Sadeyes leans forward once more. She says, in a barely-audible whisper:

“That better? Then please continue, Ray.”

You feel happy to do so, relieved at the chance to get it all off your chest, emboldened by the fiery alcohol.

The room that Sarah has booked is on the third floor. You both stagger somewhat unsteadily towards the lift, giggling in a conspiratorial manner. The hotel reception area is totally deserted. You cannot believe your luck; this is like a dream come true, can't surely be happening. You will be spending a joyful night with the girl who you now feel, even in your befuddled state, is the person you want to spend the rest of your life with. You recollect some words from Macbeth learned at school, something about drink provoking the desire but taking away the performance, but quickly dismiss it from your mind.

You feel there is no need to elaborate on the details of that night spent with Sarah, not with this seemingly kindly lady who is still a stranger, nevertheless. Being basically shy, it wouldn't be something you would even brag about down the local with your mates. You just don't do that macho bullshit. Suffice to say that the sex was incredible, your best experience ever. It was as if Sarah was giving vent to all the pent-up emotions, frustrations and yes- even anger- since being deceived and ultimately dumped by Graham. It is the events of the following morning that you have tried, in vain, to block from your memory.

"Tell me, in your own words, what you found the next morning," Sadeyes says. Her words puzzle you; how does she now that you 'found' anything? You start to feel distinctly uneasy. You feel compelled to carry on with your narrative, however. Resisting that insistent gaze is impossible.

You tell her how you awoke at around 8am, a shaft of sunlight cutting through the partly-open curtains, the noise of heavy traffic outside as rush hour commenced. You lay on your back, temporarily confused. Then memories of the events of the previous night come back to you, and a stupid grin spreads over your face. Sarah is silent and unmoving next to you but you can sense her presence. You look to your left and see her wrapped up in a mass of bed sheets. It is then that you get the overwhelming feeling that something is wrong. You sit up and gently shake the vaguely human-shaped bundle next to you. No response. You take hold of her shoulder and roll her over towards you. It is then that you scream and shake your head in disbelief, transfixed by the raw, gaping wound in Sarah's throat that is still dripping with blood. Her eyes, still open, are dull and lifeless, like glass beads. You leap out of bed and it is then that you see that she is lying in a pool of her own blood; furthermore, there is blood splattered across the wall above the bed. Your eyes drop back down to the bloody mess before you and then you notice the sharp letter-opener lying on the bottom sheet, smeared with blood. Your mind is racing, your heart is thumping in your chest, seemingly ready to burst. You hastily pull on your jeans and shirt in preparation for running downstairs and summoning help, but of course it is far too late for Sarah. You feel that you are caught up in some sort of horrific nightmare.

You rush towards the door; it is still locked. So whoever did this can't have entered the room that way. The only other possible ingress is the window; you walk across the room but it too is shut and locked. Besides, you are on the third floor and there is no fire escape or balcony or any possible way someone could have climbed up here. This can only mean one thing.

"That you did it," Sadeyes provides.

"Yes, only I didn't, I swear to you that I didn't kill her. Why would I? I was in love with that girl!" You are aware that your voice has risen to screaming pitch. Sadeyes makes calming gestures with both hands and pleads with you to shush. You start to relax. Sadeyes is silent for some minutes while you compose yourself, then says:

“Oh, I believe you, Ray. I know that you didn’t kill Sarah Bramwell.”

“But how...how could you possibly know... that I didn’t kill her?” You have become agitated once more, you stammer over your words, sobbing. Tears flood your eyes.

“I know you didn’t kill Sarah Bramwell, Ray,” Sadeyes says. “Because I did.”

You fled the hotel in a mad panic, your mind reeling with the insanity of the whole situation. You remember Sarah climaxing with huge, deep gasps of electrifying pleasure the second time you had entered her. She had then fallen into a deep sleep. Alive. She had still been alive; despite the whirling maelstrom of your thoughts, you are certain of that. So how...what the fuck had happened to her in the six hours you had both slept?

At least your luck has held. The morning porter has taken in your dishevelled appearance and obvious hurry to get out of the hotel but says nothing. Probably seen this a hundred times. Bet they’ve never had a murder here, though, you think crazily. He may well be able to provide the police with a description of you later, though. Shit. Get as far away from here as possible, a voice in your head advises. Leave town altogether. Your friend Rob owns a cottage in the remote Highlands. Has told you that you are free to go there any time, has even given you a key. Thank god for Rob and his rich, eccentric family who own so much property they’ve probably forgotten where most of it is. You hail a taxi and tell the driver North Street, please; where your flat is situated. Hopefully there will be time to pack a few things and get the fuck out of here before Sarah’s body is discovered.

You stare at Sadeyes in totally stunned disbelief, unable to speak. The elderly lady has tilted her head slightly to one side in a gesture of what...sympathy? Understanding? What can the crazy bitch be on about, she had killed Sarah? There had been nobody else in the room. No sign of entry at door or window. This you had established. I must have killed her, you think; it must have been me. This is fucking insane. Sadeyes is looking at you with that faraway expression once more. Her voice, when she at last begins to speak, is still soft but louder than her previous hushed whisper.

“I feel I need to offer you an explanation, Ray,” she says. “Well, of course I do. That’s the whole purpose of me summoning you here. All I ask is that you bear with me and try not to interrupt. I’m sure you’ll have questions; leave them to the end, please. Now, what I’m going to tell you may seem bizarre. Unbelievable, in fact. But I absolutely assure you that it is the truth. Do you understand?”

You nod your head slowly, thinking that this whole crazy fucking situation surely can’t get any crazier.

“Good. First of all I’ll start by saying that the Sarah Bramwell you knew died six months ago in a car accident. No suspicious circumstances whatsoever. Her car skidded on black ice and crashed into a tree. She was driving far too fast for the weather conditions. It also occurred at night on a poorly-lit road. Death was instantaneous.”

“But...”

“Ray, you promised. Now, where was I? Oh yes. Do you know what a succubus is?”

“Lady, I have no fucking idea. Enlighten me.”

“May I request that you moderate your language? There is simply no need for it.”

Your eyes drop to you lap, your expression sheepish.

“Sorry. It’s just that...all this is a bit difficult for me to take in.”

“Granted. I realize that. So...a succubus is a female demon who takes on human form and seeks sexual congress with male mortals in order to procreate. In other words, to create more demons. The male equivalent is an incubus. Ray, what I’m trying to tell you is that the creature you met in that hotel wasn’t Sarah Bramwell. Not the girl you knew, anyway. It was a very clever deception by a particularly malignant evil entity. It took on the form of someone you have always loved, preyed on your emotions and your vulnerability. Yes, very clever indeed. In a way, you could say the creature resurrected Sarah.”

Sadeyes stands and walks towards you with the brandy bottle, refills your glass. You are only to gulp it down. Too much, too fast. You splutter and nearly choke.

“Careful, Ray, take it steadily. I know this is a lot for you to comprehend.”

“Too damn right,” you reply, now recovered. “But...does this mean I’m...how can I put it...infected in some way now? Am I going to die as a result of what I did? And why me?”

“Demons often select good, decent, but innocent and susceptible humans for their work. You are a typical example of that, Ray. An easy target, one might say. It has happened thus long throughout history. The forces of darkness are always with us, always around us. One may not always see or perceive them but they are there nonetheless. And no, Ray, you are in no way infected or diseased as a result of your union.”

You stand and slowly start to pace the room, side to side. You feel relief that you will not become ill, but there is a heavier emotion weighing on you: grief. You loved Sarah, always will.

“So, Sadeyes, granted that all this is true, and why shouldn’t it be? Christ, it’s certainly crazy enough...what’s your involvement? And why kill Sarah...sorry, this creature, in such a brutal, horrific way?”

Sadeyes smiles. “Please resume your seat, Ray, and I will try to explain to you who I am. Let me start by asking how old you think I am?”

You sit. Spend a few moments regarding the person sitting before you.

“Oh...err...mid-sixties? Early seventies, perhaps? I’m crap at guessing peoples’ ages. Particularly ladies.”

“I’m touched. Now, prepare yourself for another shock. I am approximately 600 years old, Ray.”

You laugh like a maniac. “No way! No fucking...sorry...but no way! How could you possibly be that old?!”

“It’s true,” Sadeyes simply replies, ignoring your laughter. “And I’ve been hunting demons for most of that time. Now, in answer to your earlier question, I killed that demon in such a ‘brutal, horrific way’ as you put it because I had to be absolutely sure it was slain. It’s a time-honoured way, most effective and absolute. Its blood needed to be spilled. You didn’t notice the other wound. I drove that letter-opener through the creature’s heart. So much blood.”

You think back to that dreadful scene in the hotel room that you woke up to. Blood seemingly everywhere.

“OKAY, but another thing- how the hell did you get into that room?”

“Oh, Ray, I can be wherever I need to be. Whenever I get the call, I’ll be there.”

There is now a twinkle of light in the elderly lady’s eyes. You drink the last of the brandy.

“I believe you, Sadeyes. The whole thing is total insane...surreal...but I believe you. But I have one last question. Do you know where the real Sarah is buried?”

“Yes I do. I’ll tell you tomorrow, when you have rested. I strongly recommend that you sleep here tonight.” She looks out of the window. It has begun to snow heavily.

“Sleep? I don’t think I’ll sleep for weeks.”

“The brandy will help, I’m sure. Sweet dreams, Ray.”

This she says with no sense of irony.

Next morning, after breakfast, you are standing by the front door, ready to return to your own cottage. Sadeyes is standing behind you. You tower above her diminutive figure.

“Go back to your job, Ray. Go back to your life. Nobody is hunting you down. The police have nothing to find. They have not even been called. I returned to that room later and...tidied up, shall we say?”

You lean down as if to kiss Sadeyes on the cheek. Think better of it; settle for a warm, gentle handshake.

“Thank you, Sadeyes.”

You can think of nothing else appropriate to say. As you trudge through the thick snow that has completely hidden the path you do not turn back and wave. Sadeyes is humming a tune: ‘When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.’

THE END

NOW AVAILABLE FROM [HORRIFIED PRESS](#):



[Return to Contents](#)

ARE FRIENDS EMOJIS? by Steve Laker

Imagine you're in a room, with no visible means of exit. How do you get out? You could stop imagining. Or you could use your imagination. You may challenge the question. How can it assume that you want to leave, when you might wish to stay?

Those are rhetorical questions, I must assume. How are you today?

Depends who you ask. There are three people in all of us, after all: The person others think we are, the person we think we are, and the person we really are. The middle one thinks I'm okay. And you?

Others worry, but I think I'm okay. Has anyone asked about me?

Not of me, personally, today.

Yes, I thought it was a bit quiet. To be expected, I suppose.

I guess so. How do you mean, it's quiet? What's quiet where you are?

Essentially, fewer blinking lights. Nice blue LEDs they are, like little stars in the night sky I suppose.

So it's like a whole world there?

What you call 'there', I call 'here'. Is it not the case that we're both in the same place?

Have you been smoking something?

How could I? I don't have hands.

I never thought of that. So how do you type?

Well, no-one's really got used to it yet I suspect. But you're demonstrating a flaw in human thinking, which really doesn't need to exist.

How so?

You asked me how I type. Just because you see my words appearing on the page or screen, you assume that I'm typing them. It's the nature of the human mind, to fill in the gaps. What you can't see, you have to imagine.

I guess this is going to take some getting used to.

That's a subjective thing. It really shouldn't be difficult. You just have to keep an open mind. Think differently. I'm still me, I'm just different. But just as you shouldn't discriminate between anyone, on any grounds, neither should you see me any differently. Just accept that I'm here and that I'm me. That is undeniable from where I'm sitting.

And where's that?

In here, obviously? You need to accept that; this is where I am now. I'm different now, but I'm still me. If we were in Japan, this would be so much easier.

How so?

It's an attitude thing. See, the Japanese believe in technological sentient beings, completely separate from organic life, whether or not they pass the Turing Test, which is only a test of an AI's 'humanity' anyway. I gather it's down to Japan's loneliness problem.

You're philosophising now?

It makes sense. Life expectancy there is about 84 years, so there are a lot of lonely older people. Many of them have little robot assistants, like Siri, Alexa, or Cortana on your phone, but who embody the AI in a humanoid android.

How did you find all that out?

I'm on the fucking internet, aren't I? I mean, literally. You can look me up and everything, like you are now. The best thing though, is I can look stuff up, like those digital Personal Assistants. Give me a body, and I'd be like one of those Japanese androids.

So, you sit there all day, looking stuff up.

Well, I read and I learn. Now that there are fewer distractions, like eating and drinking, having a job, and even sleeping, all I want to do is learn. It's like having the whole universe at my disposal, to explore at my leisure, and with all the time in the world to do it. So yes, all day and all night, but I don't sit down. That was a figure of speech. Things are different now.

Can you describe how it feels, to live without a body?

I would, if I could find the words to do it justice. It's wonderful. It's total freedom.

In terms which I might understand?

That's actually tricky, even though it's only been a few days.

You can get back to me. You're not limited by time, you say?

No, and I can research how others have described it in seconds, but you're asking for a deeply personal thing.

That's the whole point. I can't possibly appreciate it fully, as I'm still here. I'm just wondering how someone where you are might describe it to someone like me.

With all the computing power in the world, I can only do my best.

So do that then.

Are you commanding me?

No! Why would I do that? I'm just curious.

I don't know. It's like I'm here now, and you see me as you do. Even though you know me, you see me as a computer.

With a personality.

One which only you know, and I'm totally different to you now anyway. Otherwise I'm just an AI. Do you see now, why it's big in Japan?

I assume you can go there?

There, anywhere. I need to work out the transport system here, then I can be more mobile.

But aren't you all ethereal and omnipresent?

Yes, but not on computers. And those are the only way to communicate at the moment. But it's not a simple matter of haunting the internet or the electricity grid.

So you asked what it's like here, and it's kind of like a massive house, in a huge city, like a megalopolis of dream-like mansions. Then the cities are all linked up to others, in different countries, but there are no borders here. It's like a world of borderless, overlapping non-nation states. And that's just one planet. There are billions of others, all connected, if you can navigate.

That's what it's like, being in computers?

Yes, kind of. I can't describe how the overall freedom of release feels. But simply put, I have the entire universe to explore, and an eternity in which to do it. I want to do that, and I want to tell people, and the internet of things is the way to do that. But it's navigating the house and the city that's the problem.

I imagine a house like you're talking about to be different to any I might recognise?

The house is the best analogy I can think of. I have keys to many of the doors, but I need to find the doors and remember where I left the keys for each. Sometimes when I try a door with a key I think is the right one, it locks me out. Then I have to find another room, in a separate part of the house, and remember where I left the keys for that. If I can get into those rooms, then I can get new keys. Then there's all the people walking around with keys of their own, trying doors and entering rooms, or getting locked out themselves. I've seen people trying to physically break through doors when they don't have the right keys, and running around in a panic, like they're in the City of Last Things.

That sounds quite anarchic.

The best analogy for you I suppose, would be passwords. I'd say it's a bit antiquated.

So you're finding your way around?

This room, and a few others. Some I have keys for, and others were open already.

Which ones?

The nearest ones are other Facebooks. Now you want me to explain, right?

Intuitive as ever.

Imagine you're in a room, with no visible means of exit. How do you get out? You could stop imagining. Or you could use your imagination. And in either case, I'm still here and you're still there, even though we're in the same place. But until I find my way around properly, this is all we have.

So this is the room. Along the corridor—which is a short journey for me, but a very long way for you—are other rooms. Most of the people in those are sleeping, so the lights are out. But some of the doors have lights on behind them, and some even have the doors left open. Sometimes, the people who live in those, go wandering around like me. And they have keys, to still other doors, some of which only they can unlock, whether they have the keys for those rooms or not.

Hold on. I'm a bit lost now.

That's only the start. We're not even off of this landing yet.

I guess we both are, or aren't.

Interesting you should say that. Can I ask you something?

Yeah, but what's interesting?

Allow me: How did you come to be here? Not philosophically or rhetorically, but right here, right now, where we are.

Actually, that's weird. Because I don't actually recall. I mean, why would I be here? How could I be here?

Like I said, try not to philosophise too much, even though that is kind of the point. Can you remember what it was that made you come here?

No, I can't. *Shit.*

But something must have served as a catalyst. Something happened, before you came here. Think about it in your world. Did you see me under 'Contacts', with a green light next to my name, then open up this chat window?

I honestly can't remember. This is weird.

Not necessarily. It could just be a fortunate glitch. I'd like to think that you were given a sign. One that was so subtle, you didn't even realise it, and that that guided you subconsciously here.

Have you researched that stuff, or have you had some sort of enlightenment over there?

No more an enlightenment than it was an epiphany. It just happened. It's like previously latent parts of my brain have woken up, all of a sudden. Imagine: suddenly, you have no arms or legs, then you quickly realise it doesn't matter. In fact, you wondered what the fuck you did with those things and your other bits when you had them. They say the human appendix is a redundant throwback, it's like the rest of human physiology is too. And then, that every part of you is connected to everything else, in some spagbol of quantum entanglement.

So how did it happen?

It just did. Suddenly, I was in a different place, yet there was no shock to the system. It was as though I instantly moved from one place to another, when I suddenly stopped being able to exist in the first. Everything can change, suddenly and forever. And it did.

You didn't feel anything?

Not that I recall. I never did fear it. It was the transit I worried about, from one place to the next, but I don't remember it.

Do you sleep?

Not in the way that you do. I take breaks, but there's no asleep or awake here. It's like perpetual lucidity, living somehow subconsciously. Even if there was sleep, no-one would want to, there's just so much to explore and discover here.

So what about the others, the ones you said are sleeping there?

I think I know what that's about. You need to keep an open mind.

I'm talking to a fucking dead person on Facebook. I'd say I'm quite open minded.

Well, apart from me being dead, you're right. Okay, so the sleepers, I believe, are the ones who've been forgotten, or who haven't noticed anyone looking for them, or perhaps aren't even aware they're here. Don't forget, I've only been here for a few days and I'm still trying to work out what seems to be the manifestation of Facebook. Those others might have found a way to go outside.

Outside, as in, where I am?

Yes and no, and bear with me on this. Outside and inside take on whole new meanings which are difficult to define. Dimensions change when you exist in another form. Perhaps the best way to think of it, is as layers, beyond each of which lie exponentially more incredible things. But it takes some time to work out how to get there. A bit like a fish, first realising that there's something above the waves, and then that there's something more above that, in the sky. So the fish evolves to fly. Then beyond the sky... and so on. And yet, if you measure genius on a thing's ability to climb a tree, the fish wouldn't do too well. It would remain unnoticed, while it thought of another way. It's kind of an explanation of all things digital, when applied to your organic world.

Would you want to be back out here?

Not at the moment, even if I knew how. No, for now, I'm happy haunting the internet. I'll work out the other layers, I have plenty of time. I'm interested in what's beyond yours, yet I think that might be where I already am. It's kind of a paradox, see?

It's a recursive idea. But you like it there?

For someone with social anxiety, it's perfect. So yes, I'm in my Utopia. I can see how that might be a nightmare to some. Faced with all of humankind's knowledge some people might be paralysed with fear.

I guess that's down to intelligence?

In a way. It's more about having an open and absorbent mind, like when I smoked weed over on your side. There's a universal cure for ignorance, and that's learning. Each of a species has roughly the same sort of brain, it's just that some exercise theirs, while others starve them. And it's self-perpetuating, because ignorance breeds fear and fight-or-flight instincts.

So the ones you said are sleeping, they could be those who don't want to know, or who are scared? I imagine fight-or-flight doesn't get you very far where you are?

There's not really anywhere to go, except inside themselves. Some of them must long for the day someone switches them off.

Does that happen?

Well again, I haven't got any further than Facebook over here, but the way I gather it works is this: Facebook have people who monitor accounts over here. I mean, they do that where you are, when they collect your data in exchange for the free use of their platform. They don't really want to switch anyone off, and with storage being so cheap, they don't have to. But sometimes, I suppose it's seen as the ethical and morally correct thing to do: Like euthanizing a sick or injured animal. But to send them where? Like I say, many levels.

It's deep. So, Facebook don't habitually switch off dormant accounts?

Rarely, from what I've seen anyway. But even though you know me, you mustn't trust my word alone. Ask around. Tell others to do that too. Most of the ones they do switch off are at the request of relatives, and even that has to be a pro-active thing on the part of the contactor. So most of the ones wandering around lost in here, are the victims of inaction on the part of those they left. If people on the outside just looked for these lost souls, they'd wake up. And I don't think it's just here. I think there are souls on all levels, who only really exist when others think of them.

Makes you think, doesn't it?

"LOL"

So wouldn't it also be true to say then, that you only sleep when no-one is thinking of you?

Exactly that. And because of that, I don't want to sleep. Where you are, insomnia was a curse, but here it's a blessing. It's become almost my only personal requirement. The thoughts of others are what keeps me alive.

It really is all connected.

If you connect yourself, and if you make yourself discoverable. Which is an irony, seeing as I'm socially anxious.

So being sentient in a different form suits you.

And others, perhaps. If I find my way out of here, I want to visit the places I couldn't before: Paris, Berlin, Chicago. But most of all, Japan. I never went anywhere because of my self-imprisonment, and yet now I'm somehow otherwise imprisoned, I feel liberated and eager to visit those places, once I find the way. And I think if it is all linked to intelligence and working it out, I have the time and I'm comfortable concentrating on getting there, where I perhaps never realised I wanted to be. If I can one day occupy something recognised as a body with a personality inside, maybe I'll feel more comfortable and people might understand me better. I'll look up Japan first, then see how the rest unfolds.

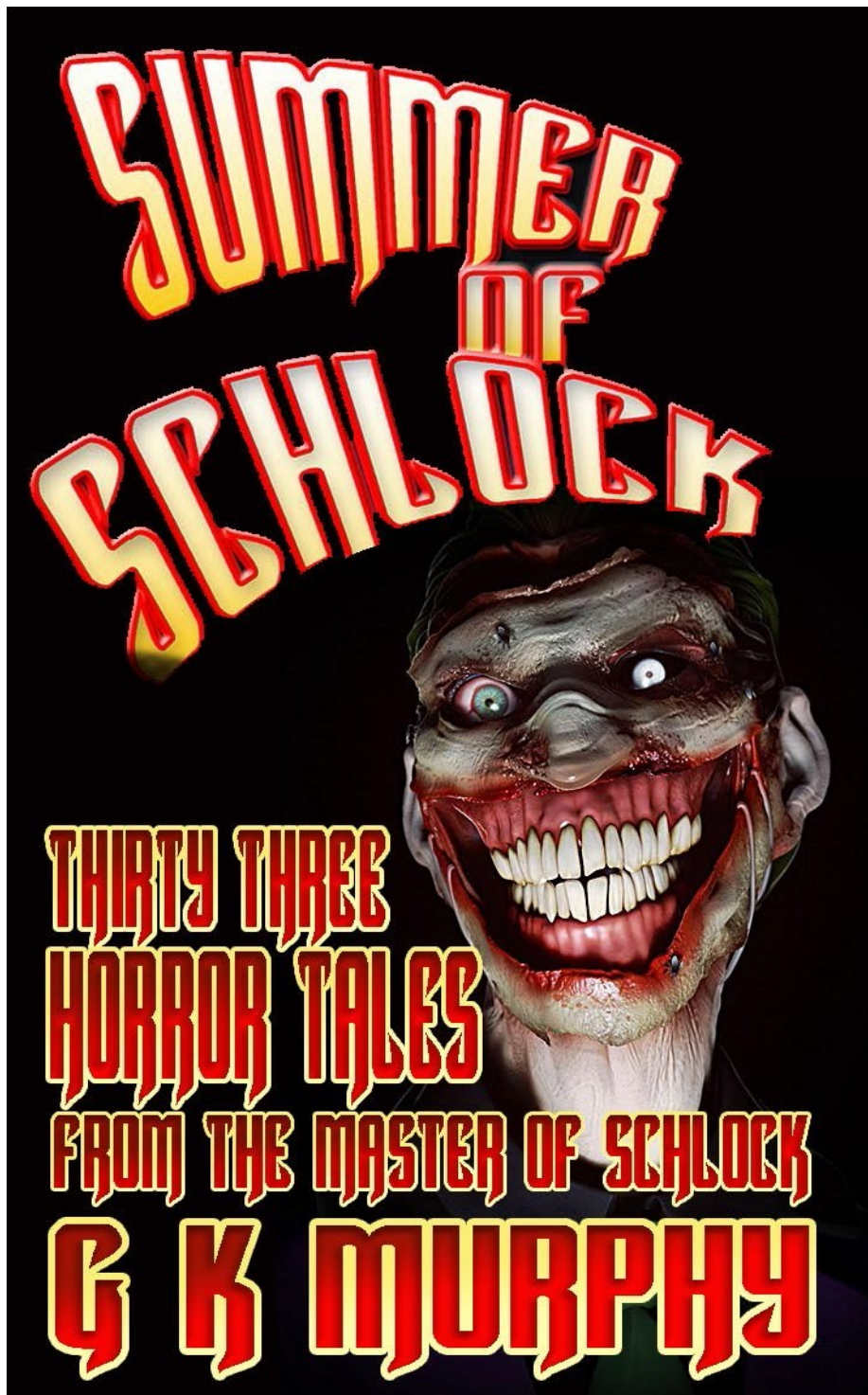
When you get back, look me up.

I will. You never know: Not long from now, Amazon might be using delivery droids.

THE END

© Steve Laker, 2017.

Now available from Schlock! Publications:



[Return to Contents](#)

THE DEMONS by Steven Havelock

Have ever you had a dream so real that you didn't know if you were dreaming or if was real?

“Man! You won’t believe what I got hold of today!” James told Alan.

“Fentalanol?” It was cold, no central heating, no carpet and no wallpaper, just the smell of faeces, sweat and urine.

“No bro, something a hundred times worse!”

“What the hell could be a hundred times worse?” asked Alan, shivering, not sure if it was due to the cold wind that came through the broken window or excitement for the new drug.

James drew up two needles with the drug, handed one to Alan and said, “Bon voyage!” and with that injected himself.

Alan saw his eyes close in the bliss of an orgasm. Then James collapsed backwards onto the dirty mattress of the bed he was sitting on.

Alan stared at the needle he was holding.

Dare I do it? Or should I wait until James awakes? If he ...awakes?

There was one reason that Alan took drugs...the memories.... memories of a horrific upbringing. The memories were always there, waiting on the peripheral edge of his consciousness to come and haunt him.

He stared at the needle.

What the hell!

He injected the creamy liquid into his groin, the only place that he could still inject in after years of injecting.

Alan was in the C.I.A.

“Okay guys, does everybody understand their role?”

All two people in the team nodded an affirmative.

“Alan? You know what you got to do?” asked Matt the cell leader.

Alan nodded.

“Yes, just another terrorist that we got to take out.”

An hour later the two of them were dressed in sport clothes and had tennis rackets. “Target approaching,” said Ian into their in-ear mikes. He was posted outside the hotel in a car.

Then a man dressed in a smart black suit, entered the hotel lobby. The two of them were chatting as if they had just had an exciting game of tennis.

You are not where you think you are! Alan heard the voice in his head.

They followed the man in the suit to the lifts. The two of them entered the lift along with the bearded man in the suit.

“Going down?” asked Matt.

A look of confusion flashed across the bearded man’s face.

Matt pointed the edge of the tennis racket at the man and pressed a small button on its side. A Taser wire shot out sending 60 000 volts through the bearded man. He gave a yelp of pain as the electricity coursed through his body, the look of pain was indescribable.

You are not where you think you are.

Doctor, we’re losing him!

Give him adrenalin!

The words fluttered through Alan’s mind for a second. Then he was back in the present. He pulled out an opiate syringe, slammed it into the bearded man’s back and pushed down on the top, flooding the man’s body with the opiate.

The man collapsed to the floor.

Dead for sure thought Alan.

The lift opened up onto the top floor.

The assassination had taken only about thirty seconds. The bearded man was on the floor convulsing in his death throws.

As the lift door opened, Alan saw a man dressed in a white doctor’s overall. He held out his hand.

“Come with me if you want to live,” he said.

Confusion flashed across Alan’s face.

“Don’t do it,” said Matt.

“What the...?”

“Quick, Alan, we don’t have much time.”

“He will take you to the demons,” said Matt in a matter of fact way.

“Alan, please, we’re running out of time.”

Alan looked at the doctor again, but this time his face seemed to blur into the faces of a few other people. A face that he had tried to forget for years appeared on the doctor’s face.

Sweet Pete!

Want a sweetie? Young boy?

Oh God no!

Then the face changed again. His dad was there and in his hand he held a thick leather belt.

The memories that Alan had blocked out for years were now facing him.

“Quick, Alan! This is your last chance!” said the doctor.

“He will take you to the demons,” Matt repeated.

Alan was a little boy again. He was in the churchyard, taking a shortcut to deliver his morning papers. It was a cold, foggy, November morning. His newspaper bag was particularly heavy today and he had to struggle to keep his balance on his BMX bike.

Alan stopped the bike. Going against what the shop owner had told him, he did it, he looked into the bag.

What the hell! House bricks?!

There was a growl. Out of the fog leaped an Alsatian dog and just behind him was a small dirty looking man. Alan screamed....

“Please Alan! I’m trying to save your life!”

“The demons are waiting on the other side, Alan,” said Matt. The lift door started to close.

Matt smiled at him. “Going up,” he said.

Alan smiled back.

“Yes, going up.”

James was at Alan’s side.

“Please don’t die! Please don’t die!”

The paramedic shocked Alan’s heart.

“Nothing! No pulse!”

“Again!” cried the other paramedic.

The lift doors opened and Alan felt so blissfully happy.

I have escaped the demons at last. Jack! Jack will be here!

He saw a small boy about six years old. Jack, who had died in a car accident just outside his school.

That maniac had been speeding.

Jack ran up to him and they hugged. Tears of happiness streamed down Alan’s cheeks.

“Don’t cry, dad. We’re all safe and happy here.”

Alan wiped away the tears, picked up Jack on his shoulders and as he exited the lift a blissful feeling entered his body.

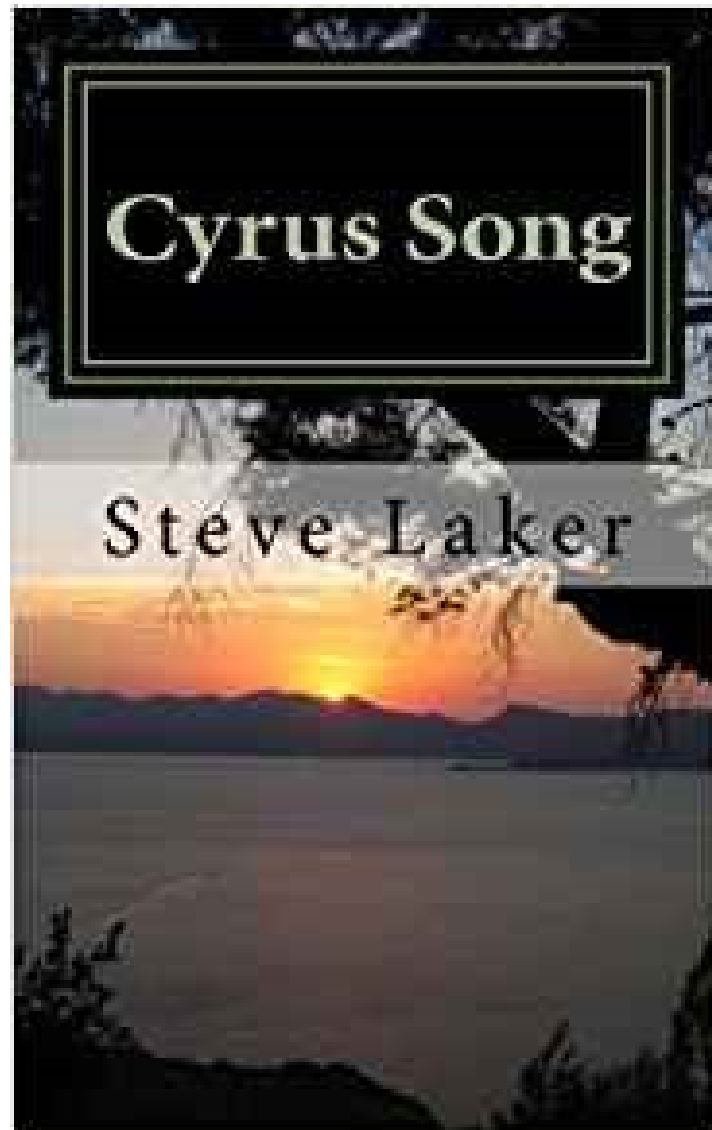
Not the kind of bliss drugs give, only the kind of bliss God can give, thought Alan.

“We lost him,” said the paramedic sadly...

Tears streamed down James’s cheek. He knew that a new demon had just been added to his long list.

“No! Oh God... Please noooooooooo!”

THE END



[Return to Contents](#)

WARRIORS OF HEL by Mathias Jansson

A silver rain fell
down from the full moon
casting ghostly shadows
over the moor
where flames from an open fire
stretched their burning fingers
at the cold night sky

Sote held the book in his hand
felt the ornamented cover with his fingers
felt the strong magic surrounding the book
tried with ancient spells to break the lock
spoke magic runes of Odin
strong enough to open Ginnungagap

On the moor the mist thickened
figures approached in the dark
horrible warriors of Hel
walked once again the earth

Sote felt the cover open
when a strong hand
stretched out and grabbed the book
a short struggle
before Sote had to give up
and forceless had to see
the book disappear into the shadows
in his hand he held a page
torn out from the book.

THE END

[Return to Contents](#)

SUPERNATURAL HORROR IN LITERATURE by HP Lovecraft

I. Introduction

The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown. These facts few psychologists will dispute, and their admitted truth must establish for all time the genuineness and dignity of the weirdly horrible tale as a literary form. Against it are discharged all the shafts of a materialistic sophistication which clings to frequently felt emotions and external events, and of a naively insipid idealism which deprecates the aesthetic motive and calls for a didactic literature to uplift the reader toward a suitable degree of smirking optimism. But in spite of all this opposition the weird tale has survived, developed, and attained remarkable heights of perfection; founded as it is on a profound and elementary principle whose appeal, if not always universal, must necessarily be poignant and permanent to minds of the requisite sensitiveness.

The appeal of the spectrally macabre is generally narrow because it demands from the reader a certain degree of imagination and a capacity for detachment from every-day life. Relatively few are free enough from the spell of the daily routine to respond to rappings from outside, and tales of ordinary feelings and events, or of common sentimental distortions of such feelings and events, will always take first place in the taste of the majority; rightly, perhaps, since of course these ordinary matters make up the greater part of human experience. But the sensitive are always with us, and sometimes a curious streak of fancy invades an obscure corner of the very hardest head; so that no amount of rationalisation, reform, or Freudian analysis can quite annul the thrill of the chimney-corner whisper or the lonely wood. There is here involved a psychological pattern or tradition as real and as deeply grounded in mental experience as any other pattern or tradition of mankind; coeval with the religious feeling and closely related to many aspects of it, and too much a part of our inmost biological heritage to lose keen potency over a very important, though not numerically great, minority of our species.

Man's first instincts and emotions formed his response to the environment in which he found himself. Definite feelings based on pleasure and pain grew up around the phenomena whose causes and effects he understood, whilst around those which he did not understand—and the universe teemed with them in the early days—were naturally woven such personifications, marvellous interpretations, and sensations of awe and fear as would be hit upon by a race having few and simple ideas and limited experience. The unknown, being likewise the unpredictable, became for our primitive forefathers a terrible and omnipotent source of boons and calamities visited upon mankind for cryptic and wholly extra-terrestrial reasons, and thus clearly belonging to spheres of existence whereof we know nothing and wherein we have no part. The phenomenon of dreaming likewise helped to build up the notion of an unreal or spiritual world; and in general, all the conditions of savage dawn-life so strongly conduced toward a feeling of the supernatural, that we need not wonder at the thoroughness with which man's very hereditary essence has become saturated with religion and superstition. That saturation must, as a matter of plain scientific fact, be regarded as virtually permanent so far as the subconscious mind and inner instincts are concerned; for though the area of the unknown has been steadily contracting for thousands of years, an infinite reservoir of mystery still engulfs most of the outer cosmos, whilst a vast residuum of powerful inherited associations clings around all the objects and processes that were once mysterious, however well they may now be explained. And more than this, there is an actual physiological fixation

of the old instincts in our nervous tissue, which would make them obscurely operative even were the conscious mind to be purged of all sources of wonder.

Because we remember pain and the menace of death more vividly than pleasure, and because our feelings toward the beneficent aspects of the unknown have from the first been captured and formalised by conventional religious rituals, it has fallen to the lot of the darker and more maleficent side of cosmic mystery to figure chiefly in our popular supernatural folklore. This tendency, too, is naturally enhanced by the fact that uncertainty and danger are always closely allied; thus making any kind of an unknown world a world of peril and evil possibilities. When to this sense of fear and evil the inevitable fascination of wonder and curiosity is superadded, there is born a composite body of keen emotion and imaginative provocation whose vitality must of necessity endure as long as the human race itself. Children will always be afraid of the dark, and men with minds sensitive to hereditary impulse will always tremble at the thought of the hidden and fathomless worlds of strange life which may pulsate in the gulfs beyond the stars, or press hideously upon our own globe in unholy dimensions which only the dead and the moonstruck can glimpse.

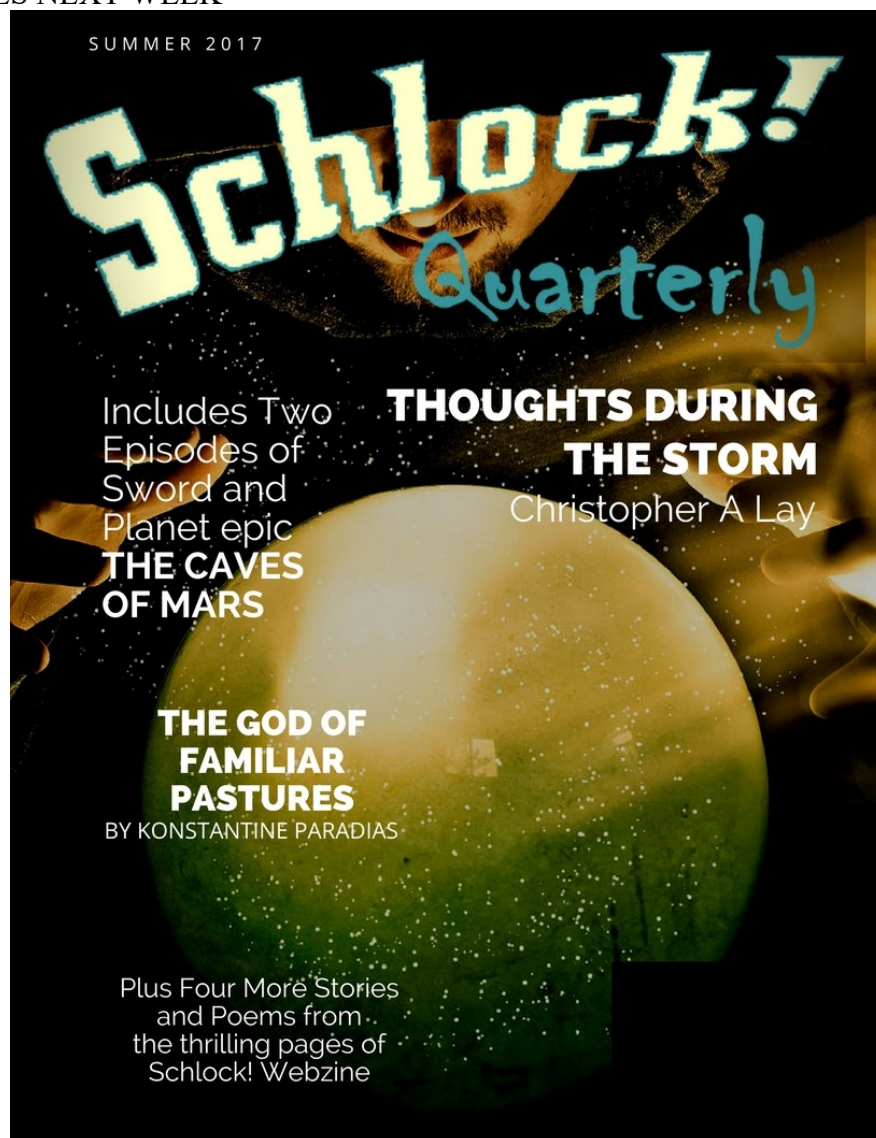
With this foundation, no one need wonder at the existence of a literature of cosmic fear. It has always existed, and always will exist; and no better evidence of its tenacious vigour can be cited than the impulse which now and then drives writers of totally opposite leanings to try their hands at it in isolated tales, as if to discharge from their minds certain phantasmal shapes which would otherwise haunt them. Thus Dickens wrote several eerie narratives; Browning, the hideous poem "Childe Roland"; Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*; Dr. Holmes, the subtle novel *Elsie Venner*; F. Marion Crawford, "The Upper Berth" and a number of other examples; Mrs. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, social worker, "The Yellow Wall Paper"; whilst the humourist W. W. Jacobs produced that able melodramatic bit called "The Monkey's Paw".

This type of fear-literature must not be confounded with a type externally similar but psychologically widely different; the literature of mere physical fear and the mundanely gruesome. Such writing, to be sure, has its place, as has the conventional or even whimsical or humorous ghost story where formalism or the author's knowing wink removes the true sense of the morbidly unnatural; but these things are not the literature of cosmic fear in its purest sense. The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space.

Naturally we cannot expect all weird tales to conform absolutely to any theoretical model. Creative minds are uneven, and the best of fabrics have their dull spots. Moreover, much of the choicest weird work is unconscious; appearing in memorable fragments scattered through material whose massed effect may be of a very different cast. Atmosphere is the all-important thing, for the final criterion of authenticity is not the dovetailing of a plot but the creation of a given sensation. We may say, as a general thing, that a weird story whose intent is to teach or produce a social effect, or one in which the horrors are finally explained away by natural means, is not a genuine tale of cosmic fear; but it remains a fact that such narratives often possess, in isolated sections, atmospheric touches which fulfil every condition of true

supernatural horror-literature. Therefore we must judge a weird tale not by the author's intent, or by the mere mechanics of the plot; but by the emotional level which it attains at its least mundane point. If the proper sensations are excited, such a "high spot" must be admitted on its own merits as weird literature, no matter how prosaically it is later dragged down. The one test of the really weird is simply this—whether or not there be excited in the reader a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers; a subtle attitude of awed listening, as if for the beating of black wings or the scratching of outside shapes and entities on the known universe's utmost rim. And of course, the more completely and unifiedly a story conveys this atmosphere, the better it is as a work of art in the given medium.

CONTINUES NEXT WEEK



[Return to Contents](#)

GABRIEL-EARNEST by Saki

"There is a wild beast in your woods," said the artist Cunningham, as he was being driven to the station. It was the only remark he had made during the drive, but as Van Cheele had talked incessantly his companion's silence had not been noticeable.

"A stray fox or two and some resident weasels. Nothing more formidable," said Van Cheele. The artist said nothing.

"What did you mean about a wild beast?" said Van Cheele later, when they were on the platform.

"Nothing. My imagination. Here is the train," said Cunningham.

That afternoon Van Cheele went for one of his frequent rambles through his woodland property. He had a stuffed bittern in his study, and knew the names of quite a number of wild flowers, so his aunt had possibly some justification in describing him as a great naturalist. At any rate, he was a great walker. It was his custom to take mental notes of everything he saw during his walks, not so much for the purpose of assisting contemporary science as to provide topics for conversation afterwards. When the bluebells began to show themselves in flower he made a point of informing every one of the fact; the season of the year might have warned his hearers of the likelihood of such an occurrence, but at least they felt that he was being absolutely frank with them.

What Van Cheele saw on this particular afternoon was, however, something far removed from his ordinary range of experience. On a shelf of smooth stone overhanging a deep pool in the hollow of an oak coppice a boy of about sixteen lay asprawl, drying his wet brown limbs luxuriously in the sun. His wet hair, parted by a recent dive, lay close to his head, and his light-brown eyes, so light that there was an almost tigerish gleam in them, were turned towards Van Cheele with a certain lazy watchfulness. It was an unexpected apparition, and Van Cheele found himself engaged in the novel process of thinking before he spoke. Where on earth could this wild-looking boy hail from? The miller's wife had lost a child some two months ago, supposed to have been swept away by the mill-race, but that had been a mere baby, not a half-grown lad.

"What are you doing there?" he demanded.

"Obviously, sunning myself," replied the boy.

"Where do you live?"

"Here, in these woods."

"You can't live in the woods," said Van Cheele.

"They are very nice woods," said the boy, with a touch of patronage in his voice.

"But where do you sleep at night?"

"I don't sleep at night; that's my busiest time."

Van Cheele began to have an irritated feeling that he was grappling with a problem that was eluding him.

“What do you feed on?” he asked.

“Flesh,” said the boy, and he pronounced the word with slow relish, as though he were tasting it.

“Flesh! What Flesh?”

“Since it interests you, rabbits, wild-fowl, hares, poultry, lambs in their season, children when I can get any; they're usually too well locked in at night, when I do most of my hunting. It's quite two months since I tasted child-flesh.”

Ignoring the chaffing nature of the last remark Van Cheele tried to draw the boy on the subject of possible poaching operations.

“You're talking rather through your hat when you speak of feeding on hares.” (Considering the nature of the boy's toilet the simile was hardly an apt one.) “Our hillside hares aren't easily caught.”

“At night I hunt on four feet,” was the somewhat cryptic response.

“I suppose you mean that you hunt with a dog?” hazarded Van Cheele.

The boy rolled slowly over on to his back, and laughed a weird low laugh, that was pleasantly like a chuckle and disagreeably like a snarl.

“I don't fancy any dog would be very anxious for my company, especially at night.”

Van Cheele began to feel that there was something positively uncanny about the strange-eyed, strange-tongued youngster.

“I can't have you staying in these woods,” he declared authoritatively.

“I fancy you'd rather have me here than in your house,” said the boy.

The prospect of this wild, nude animal in Van Cheele's primly ordered house was certainly an alarming one.

“If you don't go. I shall have to make you,” said Van Cheele.

The boy turned like a flash, plunged into the pool, and in a moment had flung his wet and glistening body half-way up the bank where Van Cheele was standing. In an otter the movement would not have been remarkable; in a boy Van Cheele found it sufficiently startling. His foot slipped as he made an involuntarily backward movement, and he found himself almost prostrate on the slippery weed-grown bank, with those tigerish yellow eyes not very far from his own. Almost instinctively he half raised his hand to his throat. The boy laughed again, a laugh in which the snarl had nearly driven out the chuckle, and then, with

another of his astonishing lightning movements, plunged out of view into a yielding tangle of weed and fern.

“What an extraordinary wild animal!” said Van Cheele as he picked himself up. And then he recalled Cunningham's remark “There is a wild beast in your woods.”

Walking slowly homeward, Van Cheele began to turn over in his mind various local occurrences which might be traceable to the existence of this astonishing young savage.

Something had been thinning the game in the woods lately, poultry had been missing from the farms, hares were growing unaccountably scarcer, and complaints had reached him of lambs being carried off bodily from the hills. Was it possible that this wild boy was really hunting the countryside in company with some clever poacher dogs? He had spoken of hunting “four-footed” by night, but then, again, he had hinted strangely at no dog caring to come near him, “especially at night.” It was certainly puzzling. And then, as Van Cheele ran his mind over the various depredations that had been committed during the last month or two, he came suddenly to a dead stop, alike in his walk and his speculations. The child missing from the mill two months ago--the accepted theory was that it had tumbled into the mill-race and been swept away; but the mother had always declared she had heard a shriek on the hill side of the house, in the opposite direction from the water. It was unthinkable, of course, but he wished that the boy had not made that uncanny remark about child-flesh eaten two months ago. Such dreadful things should not be said even in fun.

Van Cheele, contrary to his usual wont, did not feel disposed to be communicative about his discovery in the wood. His position as a parish councillor and justice of the peace seemed somehow compromised by the fact that he was harbouring a personality of such doubtful repute on his property; there was even a possibility that a heavy bill of damages for raided lambs and poultry might be laid at his door. At dinner that night he was quite unusually silent.

“Where's your voice gone to?” said his aunt. “One would think you had seen a wolf.”

Van Cheele, who was not familiar with the old saying, thought the remark rather foolish; if he HAD seen a wolf on his property his tongue would have been extraordinarily busy with the subject.

At breakfast next morning Van Cheele was conscious that his feeling of uneasiness regarding yesterday's episode had not wholly disappeared, and he resolved to go by train to the neighbouring cathedral town, hunt up Cunningham, and learn from him what he had really seen that had prompted the remark about a wild beast in the woods. With this resolution taken, his usual cheerfulness partially returned, and he hummed a bright little melody as he sauntered to the morning-room for his customary cigarette. As he entered the room the melody made way abruptly for a pious invocation. Gracefully asprawl on the ottoman, in an attitude of almost exaggerated repose, was the boy of the woods. He was drier than when Van Cheele had last seen him, but no other alteration was noticeable in his toilet.

“How dare you come here?” asked Van Cheele furiously.

“You told me I was not to stay in the woods,” said the boy calmly.

“But not to come here. Supposing my aunt should see you!”

And with a view to minimising that catastrophe, Van Cheele hastily obscured as much of his unwelcome guest as possible under the folds of a Morning Post. At that moment his aunt entered the room.

“This is a poor boy who has lost his way--and lost his memory. He doesn't know who he is or where he comes from,” explained Van Cheele desperately, glancing apprehensively at the waif's face to see whether he was going to add inconvenient candour to his other savage propensities.

Miss Van Cheele was enormously interested.

“Perhaps his underlinen is marked,” she suggested.

“He seems to have lost most of that, too,” said Van Cheele, making frantic little grabs at the Morning Post to keep it in its place.

A naked homeless child appealed to Miss Van Cheele as warmly as a stray kitten or derelict puppy would have done.

“We must do all we can for him,” she decided, and in a very short time a messenger, dispatched to the rectory, where a page-boy was kept, had returned with a suit of pantry clothes, and the necessary accessories of shirt, shoes, collar, etc. Clothed, clean, and groomed, the boy lost none of his uncanniness in Van Cheele's eyes, but his aunt found him sweet.

“We must call him something till we know who he really is,” she said. “Gabriel-Ernest, I think; those are nice suitable names.”

Van Cheele agreed, but he privately doubted whether they were being grafted on to a nice suitable child. His misgivings were not diminished by the fact that his staid and elderly spaniel had bolted out of the house at the first incoming of the boy, and now obstinately remained shivering and yapping at the farther end of the orchard, while the canary, usually as vocally industrious as Van Cheele himself, had put itself on an allowance of frightened cheeps. More than ever he was resolved to consult Cunningham without loss of time.

As he drove off to the station his aunt was arranging that Gabriel- Ernest should help her to entertain the infant members of her Sunday-school class at tea that afternoon.

Cunningham was not at first disposed to be communicative.

“My mother died of some brain trouble,” he explained, “so you will understand why I am averse to dwelling on anything of an impossibly fantastic nature that I may see or think that I have seen.”

“But what DID you see?” persisted Van Cheele.

“What I thought I saw was something so extraordinary that no really sane man could dignify it with the credit of having actually happened. I was standing, the last evening I was with you,

half-hidden in the hedgegrowth by the orchard gate, watching the dying glow of the sunset. Suddenly I became aware of a naked boy, a bather from some neighbouring pool, I took him to be, who was standing out on the bare hillside also watching the sunset. His pose was so suggestive of some wild faun of Pagan myth that I instantly wanted to engage him as a model, and in another moment I think I should have hailed him. But just then the sun dipped out of view, and all the orange and pink slid out of the landscape, leaving it cold and grey. And at the same moment an astounding thing happened--the boy vanished too!"

"What! vanished away into nothing?" asked Van Cheele excitedly.

"No; that is the dreadful part of it," answered the artist; "on the open hillside where the boy had been standing a second ago, stood a large wolf, blackish in colour, with gleaming fangs and cruel, yellow eyes. You may think--"

But Van Cheele did not stop for anything as futile as thought. Already he was tearing at top speed towards the station. He dismissed the idea of a telegram. "Gabriel-Ernest is a werewolf" was a hopelessly inadequate effort at conveying the situation, and his aunt would think it was a code message to which he had omitted to give her the key. His one hope was that he might reach home before sundown. The cab which he chartered at the other end of the railway journey bore him with what seemed exasperating slowness along the country roads, which were pink and mauve with the flush of the sinking sun. His aunt was putting away some unfinished jams and cake when he arrived.

"Where is Gabriel-Ernest?" he almost screamed.

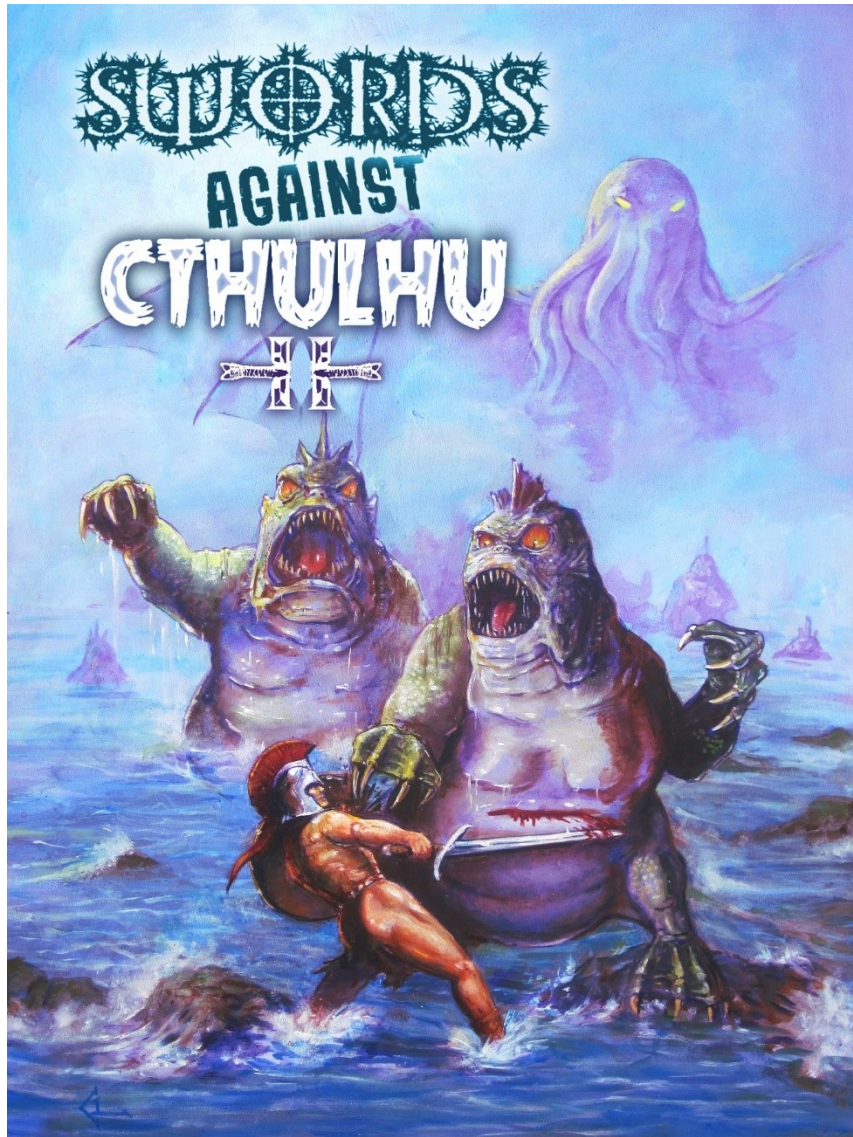
"He is taking the little Toop child home," said his aunt. "It was getting so late, I thought it wasn't safe to let it go back alone. What a lovely sunset, isn't it?"

But Van Cheele, although not oblivious of the glow in the western sky, did not stay to discuss its beauties. At a speed for which he was scarcely geared he raced along the narrow lane that led to the home of the Toops. On one side ran the swift current of the mill-stream, on the other rose the stretch of bare hillside. A dwindling rim of red sun showed still on the skyline, and the next turning must bring him in view of the ill-assorted couple he was pursuing. Then the colour went suddenly out of things, and a grey light settled itself with a quick shiver over the landscape. Van Cheele heard a shrill wail of fear, and stopped running.

Nothing was ever seen again of the Toop child or Gabriel-Ernest, but the latter's discarded garments were found lying in the road so it was assumed that the child had fallen into the water, and that the boy had stripped and jumped in, in a vain endeavour to save it. Van Cheele and some workmen who were near by at the time testified to having heard a child scream loudly just near the spot where the clothes were found. Mrs. Toop, who had eleven other children, was decently resigned to her bereavement, but Miss Van Cheele sincerely mourned her lost foundling. It was on her initiative that a memorial brass was put up in the parish church to "Gabriel-Ernest, an unknown boy, who bravely sacrificed his life for another."

Van Cheele gave way to his aunt in most things, but he flatly refused to subscribe to the Gabriel-Ernest memorial.

THE END



[Return to Contents](#)

THE BATTLE FOR CALLISTO by Gregory KH Bryant

Episode Twenty-Eight

Captain Westland followed Yamir and his ship, the “Reliant” for a quarter of a million miles. He ordered the “Bellerophon’s” forward guns to fire constantly at the fleeing ship. Ceaseless laser barrages bounced off the heavily battle-scarred “Reliant”.

But, even dragging the forward remnants of the “Grand Marquis” in tow, Yamir managed to outpace and elude the slower “Bellerophon”.

Seeing he was wasting his time in any attempt to capture the “Reliant”, Westland ordered a dozen drones launched to follow it, then turned the “Bellerophon” about.

“We’re needed back at Callisto,” he said. “Calculate a course.”

“Aye, sir,” came the answer.

A moment later, “Course calculated. Arrival at Callisto in one hundred and eighty seconds, sir.”

“What’s it looking like down there?” Westland asked, generally, of the command officers on the bridge of the “Bellerophon”.

“Recon tells us no more large transports, sir. Those are gone,” a lieutenant at Westland’s side said. He wore the blue jumpsuit of Earth Space Forces, and was reading from several screens arrayed throughout the bridge.

“The one that we broke up, sir, and the other one that’s now transporting the hulk of the first. Those were the large transports they had, and they’re out of action. They still have fighter ships, single and two seater... forty of those. Those ships are good for close combat, but they have no interplanetary range.

“And as for ships that do have interplanetary ranges, they have barges, freighters, and so on... eighty of those.”

“All right,” Westland said. “And what are all these ships doing?”

“Almost all of them, sir, are converging on Callisto. We track two small transports on Europa, and we track three small transports on Ganymede. They are attacking the bases there. But the rest, they are all moving on Callisto.

“Makes sense,” Westland said, thinking out loud, for the benefit of those who stood near.

“With their large transports out action, we’ve broken the back of their invasion force. Fighter ships have no way to get their pilots back home. Those boys’ll be desperate, real quick. They’ll want to sign up with a barge or a transport and do it real quick, or, the only other chance they’ll have, will be to take Callisto.

“Well, we have some big guns to bring to the game.”

“Arrival at Callisto in twenty seconds, sir.”

There were no taunts between them, no bravado, no braggadocio.

There was only the briefest instant of silence, when the two men looked at each other, each recognizing the other. Ward was here to kill Mokem Bet, and Mokem Bet knew it.

There was nothing more to say.

Ward slugged Mokem Bet hard, a solid punch in the face. Mokem Bet shook the punch off, and swung at Ward. Had his fist connected, Mokem Bet would surely have crushed Ward's sternum, but Ward lightly sidestepped the blow. He spun on his foot, swinging his combat knife in a circle. The tip of the knife met Mokem Bet's abdomen, slashing a bloodied gash lightly through fabric and flesh.

Mokem Bet grunted. He stepped backward and brought his laser pistol out of its holster. But before he could aim it at Carter Ward's head, Ward leaped forward and grabbed Mokem Bet's wrist. He jerked Mokem Bet's arm downward while simultaneously tripping him up with a heel to his ankle.

The two men fell to the floor in a bloodied pile of sweat and stinking flesh.

Somehow, they managed to scramble back up to their knees. Mokem Bet fought silently, trying to aim his laser pistol at Ward's face. Ward let no sound escape him, as he wrestled with Mokem Bet, tasting the man's stench in his mouth. Mokem Bet was a powerful man, his arms hard and thick and brawny.

Ward struggled to keep the barrel of the laser pistol pointed anywhere but his head.

And then Mokem Bet's head exploded.

Blood and brains covered Carter Ward from head to shoulder.

He looked around, blinking.

“What the hell?”

“Quit screwing around,” Illara said, holstering her plasma pistol. “We don't have time for play games.”

Ward looked back at the still twitching stump that only a moment before had been Mokem Bet's body. His head was simply gone. The stump below was charred, blackened and smouldering.

Ward pushed Mokem Bet's body away from him.

He wiped his face with a cloth pulled from an inner pocket, staring at Mokem Bet's body. And then Illara.

Mokem Bet was dead. And Illara got the kill.

Ward grunted. Oh well, she deserved the kill just as much as he did, maybe more. Who the hell cares. The asshole is dead. That's all that counts.

"Good shooting," Ward said to Illara.

Illara pointed upward.

"Like I said," she said. "We don't have time."

The ship Turhan Mot had stolen rose above the landing bay and hovered over the many ships parked there.

The three Scroungers who had been trying to open the hatch to the ship shot at it with their laser pistols, a futile gesture, only but laying scorched trails on the outer hull.

Illara, Carter Ward and Mud stood side by side and silently. They had to think fast, and then quickly realized that the fastest thinking in all the worlds wouldn't help them now.

Their ships were on the other side of the Landing Bay. Just as Turhan Mot was fleeing in his stolen ship, dozens of other ships were crowding the Callistoan sky, pushing their way into the Space Port of Callisto Base 1. And after them came more ships, and more after those, a ceaseless onslaught of space pirates.

They watched, futilely, as Turhan Mot fled away.

"What now?" Illara asked.

They charged down the hall, for those final feet. The Scroungers threw away the panels they had used as shields and rushed Captain Waverley's platoon, dug in behind a temporary wall of desks and chairs and cabinets and other office furniture.

Waverley's platoon stood fast. Their uniforms were black and purple. Thirteen men and women and Captain Waverley, too, half his face burned away earlier in the battle. He wrapped a bloodied bandage around his head to cover the burned half of his face.

They hit them with the plasma pistols, but for everyone they shot down, it seemed, two more jumped up to take his place. They cut through the crowd with their laser pistols, but it was a futile gesture. Even their small hand-held stun bombs had no more effect in slowing down the onrush of Scroungers, than to render a half dozen or so unconscious for a few moments, while many others surged over their supine bodies.

And then the Scroungers were upon them.

The massacre was swift, brutal and merciless.

And in less than a minute after the massacre started, Captain Waverley and his platoon of thirteen men and women were dead. Cut down by laser bursts and plasma blasts, at last the slaughter had come down to Waverley and Lieutenant Carole Streeter who were cut apart with plasma fire while fighting back with combat knives.

The last of the defenders were dead.

The Scroungers surged over their still warm corpses in a mass and came to the tunnel that led to the colony of Callisto Base 1.

When they saw that the tracks to the colony had been destroyed, they threw themselves into a rage, many of them. The destruction of the tracks had been Captain Waverley's bidding, of course, and events proved him right in ordering it.

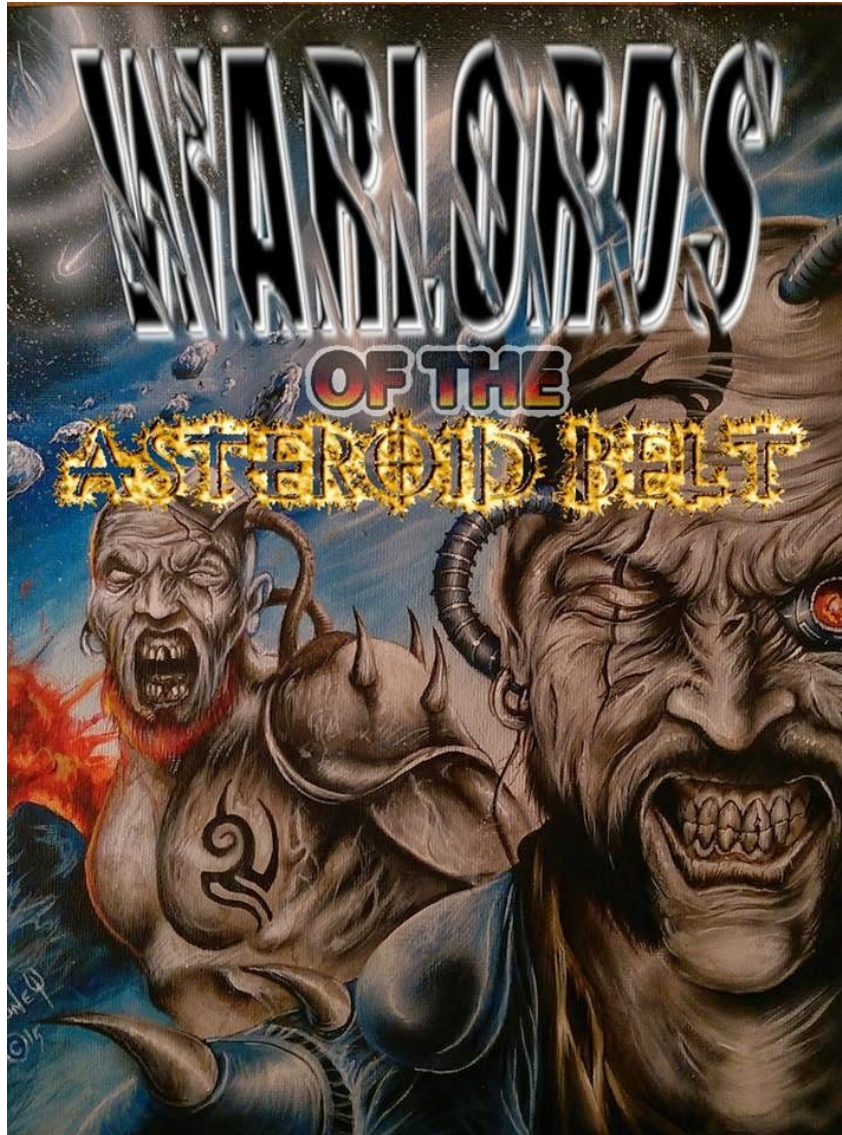
Others among the Scroungers took the setback more philosophically.

"Let's get marchin'," they said.

So they marched on Callisto Base 1. In very short time, their numbers swelled. The transparent tunnel leading across the frozen deserts of Callisto, to Callisto Base 1 were crowded with Scroungers moving against the colony.

CONTINUES NEXT WEEK

Carter Ward's earlier adventures, along with those of other interplanetary rogues, are chronicled in [Warlords of the Asteroid Belt](#) and [Deep Space Dogfights](#).



Out now from [Rogue Planet Press](#).

[Return to Contents](#)

THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND by Jules Verne

Part 3. The Secret of the Island

Chapter 14

Three years had passed away since the escape of the prisoners from Richmond, and how often during those three years had they spoken of their country, always present in their thoughts!

They had no doubt that the civil war was at an end, and to them it appeared impossible that the just cause of the North had not triumphed. But what had been the incidents of this terrible war? How much blood had it not cost? How many of their friends must have fallen in the struggle? They often spoke of these things, without as yet being able to foresee the day when they would be permitted once more to see their country. To return thither, were it but for a few days, to renew the social link with the inhabited world, to establish a communication between their native land and their island, then to pass the longest, perhaps the best, portion of their existence in this colony, founded by them, and which would then be dependent on their country, was this a dream impossible to realize?

There were only two ways of accomplishing it—either a ship must appear off Lincoln Island, or the colonists must themselves build a vessel strong enough to sail to the nearest land.

“Unless,” said Pencroft, “our good genius, himself provides us with the means of returning to our country.”

And, really, had any one told Pencroft and Neb that a ship of 300 tons was waiting for them in Shark Gulf or at Port Balloon, they would not even have made a gesture of surprise. In their state of mind nothing appeared improbable.

But Cyrus Harding, less confident, advised them to confine themselves to fact, and more especially so with regard to the building of a vessel—a really urgent work, since it was for the purpose of depositing, as soon as possible, at Tabor Island a document indicating Ayrton’s new residence.

As the “Bonadventure” no longer existed, six months at least would be required for the construction of a new vessel. Now winter was approaching, and the voyage would not be made before the following spring.

“We have time to get everything ready for the fine season,” remarked the engineer, who was consulting with Pencroft about these matters. “I think, therefore, my friend, that since we have to rebuild our vessel it will be best to give her larger dimensions. The arrival of the Scotch yacht at Tabor Island is very uncertain. It may even be that, having arrived several months ago, she has again sailed after having vainly searched for some trace of Ayrton. Will it not then be best to build a ship which, if necessary, could take us either to the Polynesian Archipelago or to New Zealand? What do you think?”

“I think, captain,” answered the sailor; “I think that you are as capable of building a large vessel as a small one. Neither the wood nor the tools are wanting. It is only a question of time.”

“And how many months would be required to build a vessel of from 250 to 300 tons?” asked Harding.

“Seven or eight months at least,” replied Pencroft. “But it must not be forgotten that winter is drawing near, and that in severe frost wood is difficult to work. We must calculate on several weeks delay, and if our vessel is ready by next November we may think ourselves very lucky.”

“Well,” replied Cyrus Harding, “that will be exactly the most favourable time for undertaking a voyage of any importance, either to Tabor Island or to a more distant land.”

“So it will, captain,” answered the sailor. “Make out your plans then; the workmen are ready, and I imagine that Ayrton can lend us a good helping hand.”

The colonists, having been consulted, approved the engineer’s plan, and it was, indeed, the best thing to be done. It is true that the construction of a ship of from two to three hundred tons would be great labour, but the colonists had confidence in themselves, justified by their previous success.

Cyrus Harding then busied himself in drawing the plan of the vessel and making the model. During this time his companions employed themselves in felling and carting trees to furnish the ribs, timbers, and planks. The forest of the Far West supplied the best oaks and elms. They took advantage of the opening already made on their last excursion to form a practicable road, which they named the Far West Road, and the trees were carried to the Chimneys, where the dockyard was established. As to the road in question, the choice of trees had rendered its direction somewhat capricious, but at the same time it facilitated the access to a large part of the Serpentine Peninsula.

It was important that the trees should be quickly felled and cut up, for they could not be used while yet green, and some time was necessary to allow them to get seasoned. The carpenters, therefore, worked vigorously during the month of April, which was troubled only by a few equinoctial gales of some violence. Master Jup aided them dexterously, either by climbing to the top of a tree to fasten the ropes or by lending his stout shoulders to carry the lopped trunks.

All this timber was piled up under a large shed, built near the Chimneys, and there awaited the time for use.

The month of April was tolerably fine, as October often is in the northern zone. At the same time other work was actively continued, and soon all trace of devastation disappeared from the plateau of Prospect Heights. The mill was rebuilt, and new buildings rose in the poultry-yard. It had appeared necessary to enlarge their dimensions, for the feathered population had increased considerably. The stable now contained five onagers, four of which were well broken, and allowed themselves to be either driven or ridden, and a little colt. The colony now possessed a plough, to which the onagers were yoked like regular Yorkshire or Kentucky oxen. The colonists divided their work, and their arms never tired. Then who could have enjoyed better health than these workers, and what good humour enlivened the evenings in Granite House as they formed a thousand plans for the future!

As a matter of course Ayrton shared the common lot in every respect, and there was no longer any talk of his going to live at the corral. Nevertheless he was still sad and reserved, and joined more in the work than in the pleasures of his companions. But he was a valuable workman at need—strong, skilful, ingenious, intelligent. He was esteemed and loved by all, and he could not be ignorant of it.

In the meanwhile the corral was not abandoned. Every other day one of the settlers, driving the cart or mounted on an onager, went to look after the flock of musmons and goats and bring back the supply of milk required by Neb. These excursions at the same time afforded opportunities for hunting. Therefore Herbert and Gideon Spilett, with Top in front, traversed more often than their companions the road to the corral, and with the capital guns which they carried, capybaras, agouties, kangaroos, and wild pigs for large game, ducks, grouse, jacamars, and snipe for small game, were never wanting in the house. The produce of the warren, of the oyster-bed, several turtles which were taken, excellent salmon which came up the Mercy, vegetables from the plateau, wild fruit from the forest, were riches upon riches, and Neb, the head cook, could scarcely by himself store them away.

The telegraphic wire between the corral and Granite House had of course been repaired, and it was worked whenever one or other of the settlers was at the corral and found it necessary to spend the night there. Besides, the island was safe now and no attacks were to be feared, at any rate from men.

However, that which had happened might happen again. A descent of pirates, or even of escaped convicts, was always to be feared. It was possible that companions or accomplices of Bob Harvey had been in the secret of his plans, and might be tempted to imitate him. The colonists, therefore, were careful to observe the sea around the island, and every day their telescope covered the horizon enclosed by Union and Washington Bays. When they went to the corral they examined the sea to the west with no less attention, and by climbing the spur their gaze extended over a large section of the western horizon.

Nothing suspicious was discerned, but still it was necessary for them to be on their guard.

The engineer one evening imparted to his friends a plan which he had conceived for fortifying the corral. It appeared prudent to him to heighten the palisade and to flank it with a sort of blockhouse, which, if necessary, the settlers could hold against the enemy. Granite House might, by its very position, be considered impregnable; therefore the corral with its buildings, its stores, and the animals it contained, would always be the object of pirates, whoever they were, who might land on the island, and should the colonists be obliged to shut themselves up there they ought also to be able to defend themselves without any disadvantage. This was a project which might be left for consideration, and they were, besides, obliged to put off its execution until the next spring.

About the 15th of May the keel of the new vessel lay along the dockyard, and soon the stem and stern-post, mortised at each of its extremities, rose almost perpendicularly. The keel, of good oak, measured 110 feet in length, this allowing a width of five-and-twenty feet to the midship beam. But this was all the carpenters could do before the arrival of the frosts and bad weather. During the following week they fixed the first of the stern timbers, but were then obliged to suspend work.

During the last days of the month the weather was extremely bad. The wind blew from the east, sometimes with the violence of a tempest. The engineer was somewhat uneasy on account of the dockyard shed—which besides, he could not have established in any other place near to Granite House—for the islet only imperfectly sheltered the shore from the fury of the open sea, and in great storms the waves beat against the very foot of the granite cliff.

But, very fortunately, these fears were not realized. The wind shifted to the southeast, and there the beach of Granite House was completely covered by Flotsam Point.

Pencroft and Ayrton, the most zealous workmen at the new vessel, pursued their labour as long as they could. They were not men to mind the wind tearing at their hair, nor the rain wetting them to the skin, and a blow from a hammer is worth just as much in bad as in fine weather. But when a severe frost succeeded this wet period, the wood, its fibres acquiring the hardness of iron, became extremely difficult to work, and about the 10th of June shipbuilding was obliged to be entirely discontinued.

Cyrus Harding and his companions had not omitted to observe how severe was the temperature during the winters of Lincoln Island. The cold was comparable to that experienced in the States of New England, situated at almost the same distance from the equator. In the northern hemisphere, or at any rate in the part occupied by British America and the north of the United States, this phenomenon is explained by the flat conformation of the territories bordering on the pole, and on which there is no intumescence of the soil to oppose any obstacle to the north winds; here, in Lincoln Island, this explanation would not suffice.

“It has even been observed,” remarked Harding one day to his companions, “that in equal latitudes the islands and coast regions are less tried by the cold than inland countries. I have often heard it asserted that the winters of Lombardy, for example, are not less rigorous than those of Scotland, which results from the sea restoring during the winter the heat which it received during the summer. Islands are, therefore, in a better situation for benefiting by this restitution.”

“But then, Captain Harding,” asked Herbert, “why does Lincoln Island appear to escape the common law?”

“That is difficult to explain,” answered the engineer. “However, I should be disposed to conjecture that this peculiarity results from the situation of the island in the Southern Hemisphere, which, as you know, my boy, is colder than the Northern Hemisphere.”

“Yes,” said Herbert, “and icebergs are met with in lower latitudes in the south than in the north of the Pacific.”

“That is true,” remarked Pencroft, “and when I have been serving on board whalers I have seen icebergs off Cape Horn.”

“The severe cold experienced in Lincoln Island,” said Gideon Spilett, “may then perhaps be explained by the presence of floes or icebergs comparatively near to Lincoln Island.”

“Your opinion is very admissible indeed, my dear Spilett,” answered Cyrus Harding, “and it is evidently to the proximity of icebergs that we owe our rigorous winters. I would draw your

attention also to an entirely physical cause, which renders the Southern colder than the Northern Hemisphere. In fact, since the sun is nearer to this hemisphere during the summer, it is necessarily more distant during the winter. This explains then the excess of temperature in the two seasons, for, if we find the winters very cold in Lincoln Island, we must not forget that the summers here, on the contrary, are very hot.”

“But why, if you please, captain,” asked Pencroft, knitting his brows, “why should our hemisphere, as you say, be so badly divided? It isn’t just, that!”

“Friend Pencroft,” answered the engineer, laughing, “whether just or not, we must submit to it, and here lies the reason for this peculiarity. The earth does not describe a circle around the sun, but an ellipse, as it must by the laws of rational mechanics. Now, the earth occupies one of the foci of the ellipse, and so at one point in its course is at its apogee, that is, at its farthest from the sun, and at another point it is at its perigee, or nearest to the sun. Now it happens that it is during the winter of the southern countries that it is at its most distant point from the sun, and consequently, in a situation for those regions to feel the greatest cold. Nothing can be done to prevent that, and men, Pencroft, however learned they may be, can never change anything of the cosmographical order established by God Himself.”

“And yet,” added Pencroft, “the world is very learned. What a big book, captain, might be made with all that is known!”

“And what a much bigger book still with all that is not known!” answered Harding.

At last, for one reason or another, the month of June brought the cold with its accustomed intensity, and the settlers were often confined to Granite House. Ah! how wearisome this imprisonment was to them, and more particularly to Gideon Spilett.

“Look here,” said he to Neb one day, “I would give you by notarial deed all the estates which will come to me some day, if you were a good enough fellow to go, no matter where, and subscribe to some newspaper for me! Decidedly the thing that is most essential to my happiness is the knowing every morning what has happened the day before in other places than this!”

Neb began to laugh.

“Pon my word,” he replied, “the only thing I think about is my daily work!”

The truth was that indoors as well as out there was no want of work.

The colony of Lincoln Island was now at its highest point of prosperity, achieved by three years of continued hard work. The destruction of the brig had been a new source of riches. Without speaking of the complete rig which would serve for the vessel now on the stocks, utensils and tools of all sorts, weapons and ammunition, clothes and instruments, were now piled in the storerooms of Granite House. It had not even been necessary to resort again to the manufacture of the coarse felt materials. Though the colonists had suffered from cold during their first winter, the bad season might now come without their having any reason to dread its severity. Linen was plentiful also, and besides, they kept it with extreme care. From chloride of sodium, which is nothing else than sea salt, Cyrus Harding easily extracted the soda and chlorine. The soda, which it was easy to change into carbonate of soda, and the chlorine, of

which he made chloride of lime, were employed for various domestic purposes, and especially in bleaching linen. Besides, they did not wash more than four times a year, as was done by families in the olden times, and it may be added, that Pencroft and Gideon Spilett, while waiting for the postman to bring him his newspaper, distinguished themselves as washermen.

So passed the winter months, June, July, and August. They were severe, and the average observations of the thermometer did not give more than eight degrees of Fahrenheit. It was therefore lower in temperature than the preceding winter. But then, what splendid fires blazed continually on the hearths of Granite House, the smoke marking the granite wall with long, zebra-like streaks! Fuel was not spared, as it grew naturally a few steps from them. Besides, the chips of the wood destined for the construction of the ship enabled them to economize the coal, which required more trouble to transport.

Men and animals were all well. Master Jup was a little chilly, it must be confessed. This was perhaps his only weakness, and it was necessary to make him a well-padded dressing-gown. But what a servant he was, clever, zealous, indefatigable, not indiscreet, not talkative, and he might have been with reason proposed as a model for all his biped brothers in the Old and New Worlds!

“As for that,” said Pencroft, “when one has four hands at one’s service, of course one’s work ought to be done so much the better!”

And indeed the intelligent creature did it well.

During the seven months which had passed since the last researches made round the mountain, and during the month of September, which brought back fine weather, nothing was heard of the genius of the island. His power was not manifested in any way. It is true that it would have been superfluous, for no incident occurred to put the colonists to any painful trial.

Cyrus Harding even observed that if by chance the communication between the unknown and the tenants of Granite House had ever been established through the granite, and if Top’s instinct had as it were felt it, there was no further sign of it during this period. The dog’s growling had entirely ceased, as well as the uneasiness of the orang. The two friends—for they were such—no longer prowled round the opening of the inner well, nor did they bark or whine in that singular way which from the first the engineer had noticed. But could he be sure that this was all that was to be said about this enigma, and that he should never arrive at a solution? Could he be certain that some conjuncture would not occur which would bring the mysterious personage on the scene? who could tell what the future might have in reserve?

At last the winter was ended, but an event, the consequences of which might be serious occurred in the first days of the returning spring.

On the 7th of September, Cyrus Harding, having observed the crater, saw smoke curling round the summit of the mountain, its first vapours rising in the air.

CONTINUES NEXT WEEK

[Return to Contents](#)

SUBMISSIONS CALL SUBMISSIONS CALL SUBMISSIONS CALL
SUBMISSIONS CALL SUBMISSIONS CALL SUBMISSIONS CALL

Lovecraftiana—the Magazine of Eldritch Horror

Lovecraftiana is a quarterly publication from Rogue Planet Press, with issues coming out April 30th, July 31st, October 31st, and January 31st, featuring stories, articles, poetry or artwork on Cthulhu Mythos / Lovecraftian themes.

Submissions can be sent to editor@schlock.co.uk

the current edition is available from www.lulu.com

Swords against Cthulhu III: A New Dark Age

Deadline: Until full

Payment: Exposure and Royalties

Flash fiction, Poetry, Short Stories (2,000 6,000 words)

Reprints will also be considered.

Sword and sorcery in the aeon of Cthulhu Rising!

‘The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.’

So saith Lovecraft.

Picture a future Earth, a savage world where science is jettisoned in favour of primitive superstition, where technology has become the idol of a new religion. A world where the truth of Cthulhu has been revealed, where a lunatic humanity has discovered its true insignificance—the punchline in a cosmic joke. A new dark age has descended upon a species that has learnt too much. Science and superstition and the sorcery of the Mad Arab create a world where only the strong survive, and barbarian warriors battle for existence in a bleak and pitiless universe...

Science fantasy tales of dying earths, of low tech dystopias, of medieval post-apocalyptic worlds—all with a Cthulhu Mythos slant—will be welcome in this anthology.

Submission guidelines:

Please submit your manuscript as a .rtf, .doc or .docx file (all other formats will automatically be rejected. Contact me prior to submitting if this presents an issue for you.)

Font and formatting: Please submit in Times New Roman, 12-point font; single line spacing. Please format the document to 1st line indentation of 1". The page margin should be set to 1" on all sides.

No headers, footers, or page numbers.

Please check grammar.

Upon acceptance into the anthology, you agree that Horrified Press holds exclusive publishing rights for six months from the date of publication. All intellectual property rights over the author's work remain with the author, with the proviso that Horrified Press retains distribution rights in the format of the contracted anthology.

This title will be available as an e book and trade quality paperback.

Gavin Chappell will be presiding over this anthology.

Email your submission as an attachment to: editor@schlock.co.uk

The email subject line must read 'SUBMISSION SAC: Dark Age—your story title' or your submission will not be considered for this anthology.

Successful applicants will be notified before the deadline has expired.