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Schlock! WEBZINE

VOL. 12, ISSUE 18
21ST JANUARY 2018

THE LEAPING MAN

BY ALEX S.
JOHNSON
HUMAN
CANNONBALL,
BABY...

THE BARON OF BEAUGARD

BY GILBERT PARKER
THE RIGHT OF THE SEIGNEUR...

THE BOOK OF GHOSTS

BY SABINE BARING-GOULD

NOTES ON WRITING WEIRD FICTION

BY HP LOVECRAFT

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SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

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Schlock! Webzine

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SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

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

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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!

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EDITORIAL

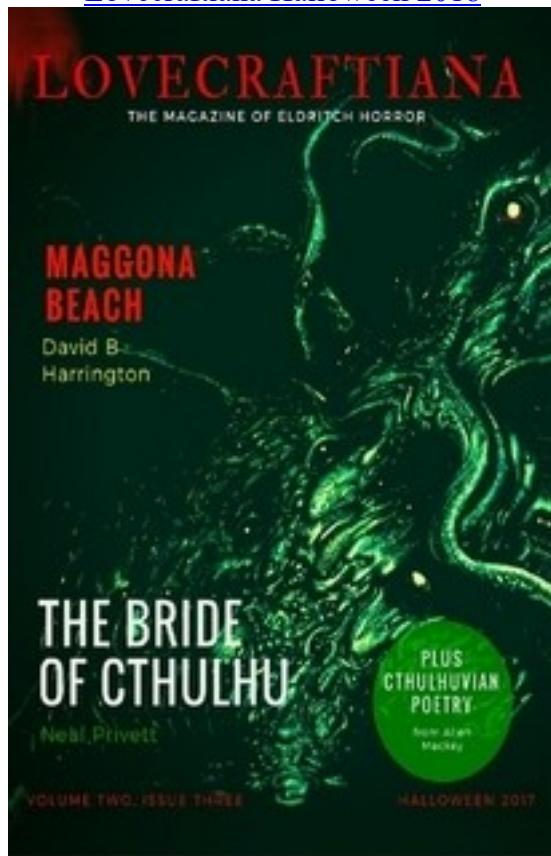
This week the losers get their ultimate revenge. A Quebecois seigneur exercises his time-honoured right with unforeseen consequences. A man is found dead in a forest cabin--but what killed him? And Sabine Baring-Gould opens his *Book of Ghosts* to relate a story of a dead waiter.

HP Lovecraft lays down the law for writing weird fiction—some very useful ideas here, all you weird authors out there—followed by his chilling tale *In The Vault*. Our interplanetary hero sets out on his journey *Across the Zodiac* with the power of the Apergy. And in *The War of the Worlds*, the narrator returns home from Horsell Common.

—Gavin Chappell

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[Lovecraftiana Halloween 2018](#)



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THE LEAPING MAN by Alex S Johnson

It was the leap that sold me.

If like many of us you found yourself watching a lot of daytime TV, you couldn't miss them: the commercials for Luck E. Dynamo's Self-Made Man seminars, in which the reigning king of posthuman whipped an auditorium packed with impoverished, flabby losers into a froth of actuated potential. At some point in the ads, as Dynamo flashed the muscular heft of his jaw and showed his large, gleaming, even white teeth, booming out his tale of secular grace and second chances, men began leaping. I took it as an article of faith that elsewhere, in equal proportion but fluid as dolphins, women also leapt to Dynamo's gospel, but these were guys, and that felt significant. Especially if, as I did, you fought hours of brain-jellying anxiety by day and the terror by night, wondering if anything like a livelihood gleamed from the future like the rim of some craft sent here from deep space to save humanity.

The move from horizontal to vertical and from there to launch mode looked like salvation; whatever was behind it, I wanted some.

So I did it—begged, borrowed and very nearly stole for a Self-Made Man seminar at the lowest possible membership rate. I wanted to see the leaping first-hand, feel deep in my toes the miracle of revelation that inspired it, and—please, gods, just for once—wrest myself from the surly bonds of earth to touch...whatever. I knew the words, had them memorized, but that wasn't enough. I needed to hear with my own ears how Dynamo had crafted his empire of enterprise from readily available materials. How a 350-pound shlub received the Tablets of Prosperity. I was desperate to feel so buoyant and reckless that even at the \$250 level, if only for a few unforgettable moments, I either forgot gravity existed or was seized by the will to bloody its nose. Take that, you...impersonal forces that try to keep me down...you'll be hearing from...me. Then BOOM—human cannonball, baby. I'd figure it out from there, some atmospheric freestyle or other. Touched on the brow with the magic money sign by the Dynamo himself.

And then, there I was. I wore my lucky suit, which was also my interview suit, the one I wore in the divorce proceedings and, to be brutally frank, the working twin of a pair of suits. The other being so distressed, tattered and stained I can barely speak of it except in shamed whispers in a supportive recovery setting. Things happened around the time of my break with the former Mrs. Anthony Cranston, bad things...suffice it to say, I dressed to smash limits in the steel grey suit with a breath of padding in the shoulders, the one found nowhere near the scene of the terminal bender. I wanted to look, if not feel, my best standing next to my peers—especially if the roving, omnipresent cameras happened to catch me mid-air, fist pumping, nerve tips a-tingle with the happy juice.

In the beginning I felt let down, disappointed. Luck E. Dynamo (born Luke Dinormo) spoke well and convincingly, but like I said I knew the story by heart.

How he'd pounded out the rough outlines of his seminars in a trailer park while working nights as a mall security guard and fighting multiple substance abuse issues, an eating disorder and a craving for powdered donuts so powerful and magnetic it nearly destroyed the last shreds of his self-confidence.

About the first leapers, toothless meth heads to be sure, but inspired nonetheless by Luck E.’s prototype “my success story” presentation; an improvised trampoline setup, and a crude, badly edited video that still went viral.

How Dynamo came to understand the art of propagating faith in one’s own essence; that the throw of genetic die, environmental factors and deep personal quirk might constitute a brand, which with a little advance work and investment could grow to sell itself, draw an army of inspired salesmen, and so forth on down the line. So that what you started with and who you actually were became revealed, in the end, as the Luck E. bundle—all you would ever need to prosper. And how from there the money began to trickle in—not a huge amount at first, not all of it authentic currency, but just enough to convince Luck he was on to something real.

So far, so good, but it was also a little bit so what and what the hell was I thinking. The ads for the seminars had me convinced that at some point in the presentation, men would throw themselves in the air like business-suited versions of “Diamond” Dave Roth from Van Halen, but I waited and waited and never saw the least sign of lift-off. Even the many true believers Dynamo invited onstage at the end of his spiel to attest that they too were Self Made Men stayed firmly planted on the ground.

Something was wrong.

Yet just as I despaired, the icy cold grip around my heart ever-so-familiar from the night terrors, the chill sweat hovering on my skin, I felt it. A tingling in my toes, followed by a vast sense of relief. My flesh was melting, evaporating, and with it every tie to earth, limitation, the confinement to forms. I’d been seeking a saviour, a solution, a sign, but aid lay far closer—within me.

I saw my black dress shoes skimming the floor, as others turned to look, distracted from Dynamo’s sales pitch for advanced one-on-one seminars. All these men, I realized, had come to see the leaper, some hapless sideshow geek imbued without warning or rational explanation with the Power—without understanding a simple truth.

It was so intuitive, so freaking elementary. And you truly didn’t need outside assistance to make it happen.

“C’mon!” I said, watching myself as though from outside, a full two feet from the floor. Then three. My fist surged towards the ceiling. I pumped it. “It’s working! Join me!”

At some level my attitude and altitude in space seemed ridiculous—because it was. I understood so many things: the crafted gimmickry of the leapers in the commercial. The amount of marketing research involved. The sheer lie of it.

The stunning images that had brought me to the seminar peeled away like tacky wallpaper. But nothing looked so fake, false and tawdry now as the man himself.

I shifted to diagonal. The auditorium swam before me. So many hues of conservative, corporate blues and blacks and silvers and reds. So many pink and brown and black faces on which were written the tangible signs of dreams; their desire to be rich in America before they were too old to appreciate it, or the empire was irretrievably lost, or all of us were

swallowed in a nuclear cloud. To be somebody, not just another fat, huffing dingbat nearly flattened by depression and fear.

Luck E. Dynamo had worked on our desperation for success, cooking up a fantasy of what it might look like. He'd shown us men in flight and led us to believe his message had propelled them there. But leaping wasn't anything, when flying came naturally.

Yes, incredibly enough, we could fly. All of us. But not him.

I rotated back. Now others had kicked themselves free. We hovered, struck goofy poses, extreme parodies of the original Leaping Man—tongues thrust between our lips like dogs, ties askew, bugged-out eyes. We pretended to be Atlas or The Thinker, The Discus Thrower; a gymnast vaulting; seven lords a leaping. We rested on our backs, cycled through the air, caught stray fancies and cruised them the way hawks take thermal drafts. Men joined hands and executed flawless mid-air acrobatics. The air filled with an excited chatter, the energy of new ideas. Except for Dynamo, who said nothing.

All these men had caught on. The irony that but for the flimsy showmanship of this con artist, we might long ago have found our own stride. Not by metabolic booster shakes or cold showers at dawn, but along individual lines, however fraught with whimsy and weirdness, our own ineffable flavours, even sleeping in and leftover pizza. Some of us were cosplay geeks, for example, and that was fine. We were overweight, and nerdy, and had complete conversations with ourselves, and dressed as furry creatures or unicorns or robots. We—men and women alike—looked like slatternly hobbits on an off day. We didn't have razor-cut profiles and machine-tooled jaws. But we were okay.

As for Dynamo, he had begun to sink. Psychologically. Physically. You could see it first in his face, on the enormous TV monitors planted above the stage on both sides; a sag in confidence, a slackening of the muscles, a dullness creeping into those too-vivid, too-keen cobalt eyes—the cold eyes of a predator, of a Tom Cruise, turned to mud and muck and void. Luck E. Dynamo was the asshole in the room, the bully we all loathed. He wasn't our hero. He was a creep. Far from leaping, let alone flying, he could barely stand.

We began to stream out of the auditorium en masse. Looking back, we saw on the monitors Dynamo's face begin to break up, his features buckling, distorting. Maybe he was trying to say something, but no coherent words formed, just gasps, groans and a long, anguished howl. He raised a half-hearted fist in the air, but it swiftly fell slack against his side. Then he fell to the floor, and lay there motionless, except for a twitching left index finger, emphasizing a point he didn't have the juice left to make.

We flew down into the street, among the crowds, to share how easy it was: to walk, to hang, to loaf and take one's ease, to strap a single horn to our foreheads; to fly, to pirouette, to play games and defeat or be defeated, unthreatened by the vagaries of chance and change.

And to say, with finality, fuck a leaping man.

THE END

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WINTER 2017-18

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THE BARON OF BEAUGARD by Gilbert Parker

“The Manor House at Beaugard, Monsieur? Ah, bien sûr, I mind it very well. It was the first in Quebec, and there are many tales. It had a chapel and a gallows. Its baron, he had the power of life and death, and the right of the seigneur—you understand? which he used only once; and then what trouble it made for him and the woman, and the seigneury, and the parish, and all the country!”

“What is the whole story, Pierre?” said Tybalt, who had spent months in the French half-breed’s company, stalking game, and tales, and legends of the North.

“Mais, I do not know for sure; but the Abbé Frontone, he and I were snowed up together in that same house which now belongs to the Church, and in the big fireplace, where we sat on a bench toasting our knees and our bacon, he told me the tale as he knew it. He was a great scholar—there is none greater. He had found papers in the wall of the house, and from the Government chest he got more. Then there were the tales handed down, and the records of the Church—for she knows the true story of every man that has come to New France from first to last. So, because I have a taste for tales, and gave him some, he told me of the Baron of Beaugard and that time he took the right of the seigneur, and the end of it all.

“Of course it was a hundred and fifty years ago, when Bigot was Intendant—ah, what a rascal was that Bigot, robber and deceiver! He never stood by a friend, and never fought fair a foe—so the Abbé said. Well, Beaugard was no longer young. He had built the Manor House, he had put up his gallows, he had his vassals, he had been made a lord, he had quarrelled with Bigot and had conquered, but at great cost; for Bigot had such power, and the Governor had trouble enough to care for himself against Bigot, though he was Beaugard’s friend.

“Well, there was a good lump of a fellow who had been a soldier, and he picked out a girl in the Seigneury of Beaugard to make his wife. It is said the girl herself was not set for the man, for she was of finer stuff than the peasants around her, and showed it. But her father and mother had a dozen other children, and what was the girl, this Falise, to do? She said yes to the man, the time was fixed for the marriage, and it came along.

“So. At the very hour of the wedding Beaugard came by, for the Church was in mending, and he had given leave it should be in his own chapel. Well, he rode by just as the bride was coming out with the man—Garoche. When he saw Falise he gave a whistle, then spoke in his throat, reined up his horse, and got down. He fastened his eyes on the girl’s. A strange look passed between them—he had never seen her before, but she had seen him often, and when he was gone, had helped the housekeeper with his rooms. She had carried away with her a stray glove of his. Of course it sounds droll, and they said of her when all came out it was wicked; but evil is according to a man’s own heart, and the girl had hid this glove as she hid whatever was in her soul—hid it even from the priest....

“Bien, the Baron looked and she looked, and he took off his hat, stepped forward,’ and kissed her on the cheek. She turned pale as a ghost, and her eyes took on the colour that her cheeks lost. When he stepped back he looked close at the husband. ‘What is your name?’ he said. ‘Garoche, Monsieur le Baron,’ was the reply. ‘Garoche! Garoche!’ he said, eyeing him up and down. ‘You have been a soldier?’ ‘Yes, Monsieur le Baron?’ ‘You have served with me?’ ‘Against you, Monsieur le Baron when Bigot came fighting.’ ‘Better against me than for me,’ said the Baron speaking to himself, though he had so strong a voice that what he said

could be heard by those near him—that is, those who were tall, for he was six and a half feet, with legs and shoulders like a bull.

“He stooped and stroked the head of his hound for a moment, and all the people stood and watched him, wondering what next. At last he said: ‘And what part played you in that siege, Garoche?’ Garoche looked troubled, but answered: ‘It was in the way of duty, Monsieur le Baron—I with five others captured the relief-party sent from your cousin the Seigneur of Vadrome.’ ‘Oh,’ said the Baron looking sharply, ‘you were in that, were you? Then you know what happened to the young Marmette?’ Garoche trembled a little, but drew himself up and said: ‘Monsieur le Baron, he tried to kill the Intendant—there was no other way.’ ‘What part played you in that, Garoche?’ Some gasped, for they knew the truth, and they feared the wild temper of the Baron. ‘I ordered the firing-party. Monsieur le Baron,’ he answered.

“The Seigneur’s eyes got fierce and his face hardened, but he stooped and drew the ears of the hound through his hand softly. ‘Marmette was my cousin’s son, and had lived with me,’ he said; ‘A brave lad, and he had a nice hatred of vileness—else he had not died.’ A strange smile played on his lips for a moment, then he looked at Falise steadily. Who can tell what was working in his mind? ‘War is war,’ he went on, ‘and Bigot was your master, Garoche; but the man pays for his master’s sins this way or that. Yet I would not have it different, no, not a jot.’ Then he turned round to the crowd, raised his hat to the Curé, who stood on the chapel steps, once more looked steadily at Falise, and said: ‘You shall all come to the Manor House, and have your feastings there, and we will drink to the homecoming of the fairest woman in my seigneury. Your company also. Monsieur le Curé,’ he said, as he saw the priest gazing at him, and with that he turned round, bowed to Falise, put on his hat, caught the bridle through his arm, and led his horse to the Manor House, the big hound following.

“That was in the afternoon. Of course, whether they wished or not, Graroche and Falise could not refuse, and the people were glad enough, for they would have a free hand at meat and wine, the Baron being bountiful of table. And it was as they guessed, for though the time was so short, the people at Beaugard soon had the tables heavy with food and drink. It was just at the time of candle-lighting the Baron came in, and gave a toast. ‘To the dwellers in Eden to-night,’ he said—‘Eden against the time of the Angel and the Sword.’ I do not think that any except the Curé and the woman understood, and she, maybe, only because a woman feels a thing, and knows from that, even when her brain does not. After they had done shouting to his toast, he said a good-night to all, and they began to leave, the Curé among the first to go, with a troubled look in his face. He could not have prevented what came after, and so he held his peace. Then, too, he had been with the Baron before the feasting, and what passed between them who can tell?

“As the people left, the Baron said to Garoche and Falise, ‘A moment with me before you go.’ The woman started, for she thought of one thing, and Garoche started, for he thought of another—the siege of Beaugard and the killing of young Marmette. But they followed the Seigneur to his chamber. Coming in he shut the door on them. Then he turned to Garoche. ‘You will accept the roof and bed of Beaugard to-night, my man,’ he said, ‘and come to me here at nine to-morrow morning.’ Garoche stared hard for an instant. ‘Stay here,’ he said, ‘Falise and me stay here in the manor, Monsieur le Baron!’ ‘Here, even here, Garoche; so good-night to you,’ said the Baron. Garoche turned towards the girl. ‘Then come, Falise,’ he said, and reached out his hand. ‘Your room shall be shown you at once,’ the Seigneur added softly, ‘the lady’s at her pleasure.’

“Then a cry burst from Garoche, and he sprang forward, but the Baron waved him back. ‘Stand off,’ he said, ‘and let the lady choose between us.’ ‘She is my wife,’ said Garoche. ‘I am your Seigneur,’ said the other. ‘And there is more than that,’ he went on; ‘for damn me, she is too fine stuff for you, and the Church shall untie what she has tied to-day.’ At that Falise fainted, and the Baron caught her as she fell. He laid her on a couch, keeping an eye on Garoche the while. ‘Loose her gown,’ he said, ‘while I get brandy.’ Then he turned to a cupboard, poured liquor, and came over. Garoche had her dress open at the neck and bosom, and was staring at something on her breast. The Baron saw also, stooped, with a strange sound in his throat, and picked it up. ‘My glove,’ he said. ‘And on her wedding day! Here is its mate, fished this morning from my hunting coats, a pair the Governor gave me. You see, man, you see her choice.’

“At that he stooped and put some brandy to her lips, Garoche drew back sick and numb, and did nothing, only stared. Falise came to herself soon, and when she felt her dress open, gave a cry. Garoche could have killed her then, when he saw her shudder from him, as if afraid, over towards the Baron, who held the glove in his hand, and said: ‘Voilá Garoche, you had better go. In the next room they will tell you where to sleep. To-morrow, as I said, you will meet me here. We shall have things to say, you and I.’ Ah, that Baron, he had a droll mind, but in truth he loved the woman, as you shall see.

“Garoche got up without a word, went to the door and opened it, the eyes of the Baron and the woman following him, for there was a devil in his eye. In the other room there were men waiting, and he was taken to a chamber and locked in. You can guess what that night must have been to him—oui alors.’

“What was it to the Baron and Falise?”

“Monsieur, what do you think? Beaugard had never had an eye for women; loving his hounds, fighting, quarrelling, doing wild strong things. So, all at once he was face to face with a woman who has the look of love in her face, who was young, rich, and fine of body, so the Abbé said, and was walking to marriage, at her father’s will, and against her own, carrying his glove in her bosom. What should he do? But no, ah, no, Monsieur, not as you think, not quite. Wild, with the bit in his teeth, yes; but at heart—well, here was the one woman for him, he knew it all in a minute, and he would have her once and for all, and till death should come their way. And so he said to her as he raised her, she drawing back afraid, her heart hungering for him, yet fear in her eyes, and her fingers trembling as she softly pushed him from her. You see, she did not know quite what was in his heart. She was the daughter of a tenant vassal, who had lived in the family of a grand seigneur in her youth, the friend of his child—that was all, and that was where she got her manners and her mind.

“She got on her feet and said: ‘Monsieur le Baron, you will let me go—to my husband. I cannot stay here. Oh, you are great, you are noble, you would not make me sorry, make me to hate myself—and you. I have only one thing in the world of any price—you would not steal my happiness?’ He looked at her steadily in the eyes, and said: ‘Will it make you happy to go to Garoche?’ She raised her hands and wrung them. ‘God knows, God knows, I am his wife,’ she said helplessly, ‘and he loves me.’ ‘And God knows, God knows,’ said the Baron, ‘it is all a question of whether one shall feed and two go hungry, or two gather and one have the stubble. Shall not he stand in the stubble? What has he done to merit you? What would he do? You are for the master, not the man; for love, not the feeding on; for the manor-house and the hunt, not the cottage and the loom.’

"She broke into tears, her heart thumping in her throat. 'I am for what the Church did for me this day,' she said. 'Oh, sir, I pray you, forgive me and let me go. Do not punish me, but forgive me—and let me go. I was wicked to wear your glove—wicked, wicked.' 'But no,' was his reply, 'I shall not forgive you so good a deed, and you shall not go. And what the Church did for you this day, she shall undo—by all the saints, she shall! You came sailing into my heart this hour past on a strong wind, and you shall not slide out on an ebb-tide. I have you here, as your Seigneur, but I have you here as a man who will——'

"He sat down by her at that point, and whispered softly in her ear: at which she gave a cry which had both gladness and pain. 'Surely, even that,' he said, catching her to his breast. 'And the Baron of Beaugard never broke his word.' What should be her reply? Does not a woman when she truly loves, always believe? That is the great sign. She slid to her knees, and dropped her head into the hollow of his arm. 'I do not understand these things,' she said, 'but I know that the other was death, and this is life. And yet I know too, for my heart says so, that the end—the end, will be death.'

"'Tut, tut, my flower, my wild-rose,' he said, 'of course the end of all is death, but we will go a-Maying first, come October and the breaking of the world when it must. We are for Maying now, my rose of all the world!' It was as if he meant more than what he said, as if he saw what would come in that October which all New France never forgot, when as he said, the world broke over them.

"The next morning the Baron called Garoche to him. The man was like some mad buck harried by the hounds, and he gnashed his teeth behind his shut lips. The seigneur eyed him curiously yet kindly too, as well he might, for when was ever man to hear such a speech as came to Garoche the morning after his marriage. 'Garoche,' the Baron said, having waved his men away, 'as you see, the lady made her choice—and for ever. You and she have said your last farewell in this world—for the wife of the Baron of Beaugard can have nothing to say to Garoche the soldier.' At that Garoche snarled out, 'The wife of Baron Beaugard! That is a lie to shame all hell.' The Baron wound the lash of a riding-whip round and round his fingers quietly, and said: 'It is no lie, my man, but the truth.' Garoche eyed him savagely, and growled: 'The Church made her my wife yesterday. And you! —you! —you! —ah, you who had all—you with your money and place, which could get all easy, you take the one thing I have. You, the grand seigneur are only a common robber! Ah! Jésu—if you would but fight me!'

"The Baron, very calm, said, 'First, Garoche, the lady was only your wife by a form which the Church shall set aside—it could never have been a true marriage. Second, it is no stealing to take from you what you did not have. I took what was mine—remember the glove! For the rest—to fight you? No, my churl, you know that's impossible. You may shoot me from behind a tree or a rock, but swording with you? —Come, come, a pretty gossip for the Court! Then, why wish a fight? Where would you be, as you stood before me—you?' The Baron stretched himself up, and smiled down at Garoche. 'You have your life, man; take it and go—to the farthest corner of New France, and show not your face here again. If I find you ever again in Beaugard, I will have you whipped from parish to parish. Here is money for you—^good gold coins. Take them, and go.'

"Garoche got still and cold as stone. He said in a low, harsh voice, 'Monsieur le Baron, you are a common thief, a wolf, a snake. Such men as you come lower than Judas. As God has an

eye to see, you shall pay all one day. I do not fear you nor your men, nor your gallows. You are a jackal, and the woman has a filthy heart—a ditch of shame.'

"The Baron drew up his arm like lightning, and the lash of his whip came singing across Garoche's pale face. Where it passed a welt rose at once, but the man never stirred. The arm came up again, but a voice behind the Baron said, 'Ah, no, no, not again!' There stood Falise. Both men looked at her. 'I have heard Garoche,' she said. 'He does not judge me right. My heart is no filthy ditch of shame. But it was breaking when I came from the altar with him yesterday. Yet I would have been a true wife to him after all. A ditch of shame—ah, Garoche—Garoche! And you said you loved me, and that nothing could change you!'

"The Baron said to her, 'Why have you come, Falise? I forbade you.' 'Oh, my lord,' she answered, 'I feared—for you both. When men go mad they know not what they do. When they slander and hate, a devil has gone into them.' The Baron, taking her by the hand, said, 'Permit me,' and he led her to the door for her to pass out. She looked back sadly at Garoche, standing for a minute very still. Then Garoche said, 'I command you, come with me; you are my wife.' She did not reply, but shook her head at him. Then he spoke out high and fierce: 'May no child be born to you. May a curse fall on you. May your fields be barren, and your horses and cattle die. May you never see nor hear good things. May the waters leave their courses to drown you, and the hills their bases to bury you, and no hand lay you in decent graves!'

"The woman put her hands to her ears, and gave a little cry, and the Baron pushed her gently on, and closed the door after her. Then he turned on Garoche. 'Have you said all you wish?' he asked. 'For, if not, say on, and then go; and go so far you cannot see the sky that covers Beaugard. We are even now—we can cry quits. But that I have a little injured you, you should be done for instantly. But hear me: if I ever see you again, my gallows shall end you straight. Your tongue has been gross before the mistress of this manor; I will have it torn out, if it so much as syllables her name to me or to the world again. She is dead to you. Go, and go for ever!' He put a bag of money on the table, but Garoche turned away from it, and without a word left the room, and the house, and the parish, and said nothing to no man of the evil that had come to him.

"But what talk was there, and what dreadful things were said at first! —that Garoche had sold his wife to the Baron; that he had been killed and his wife taken; that the Baron kept him a prisoner in a cellar under the Manor House. And all the time there was Falise with the Baron—very quiet and sweet and fine to see, and going to Chapel every day, and to Mass on Sundays—which no one could understand, any more than they could see why she should be called the Baroness of Beaugard; for had they all not seen her married to Garoche? And there were many people who thought her vile. Yet truly, at heart, she was not so—not at all. Then it was said that there was to be a new marriage; that the Church would let it be so, doing and undoing, and doing again. But the weeks and the months went by, and it was never done. For, powerful as the Baron was, Bigot, the Intendant, was powerful also, and fought the thing with all his might. The Baron went to Quebec to see the Bishop and the Governor, and though promises were made, nothing was done. It must go to the King and then to the Pope, and from the Pope to the King again, and so on. And the months and the years went by, as they waited, and with them came no child to the Manor House of Beaugard. That was the only sad thing—that and the waiting, so far as man could see. For never were man and woman truer to each other than these, and never was a lady of the manor kinder to the poor, or a lord freer of hand to his vassals. He would bluster sometimes, and string a peasant up by the heels, but his

gallows was never used, and, what was much in the minds of the people, the Curé did not refuse the woman the sacrament.

“At last, the Baron, fierce because he knew that Bigot was the cause of the great delay, so that he might not call Falise his wife, seized a transport on the river, which had been sent to brutally levy upon a poor gentleman, and when Bigot’s men resisted, shot them down. Then Bigot sent against Beaugard a company of artillery and some soldiers of the line. The guns were placed on a hill looking down on the Manor House across the little river. In the evening the cannons arrived, and in the morning the fight was to begin. The guns were loaded and everything was ready. At the Manor all was making ready also, and the Baron had no fear.

“But Falise’s heart was heavy, she knew not why. ‘Eugene,’ she said, ‘if anything should happen!’ ‘Nonsense, my Falise,’ he answered; ‘what should happen?’ ‘If—if you were taken—were killed!’ she said. ‘Nonsense, my rose,’ he said again, ‘I shall not be killed. But if I were, you should be at peace here.’ ‘Ah, no, no,’ said she. ‘Never. Life to me is only possible with you. I have had nothing but you—none of those things which give peace to other women—none. But I have been happy—oh, yes, very happy. And, God forgive me, Eugene, I cannot regret, and I never have. But it has been always and always my prayer that, when you die, I may die with you—at the same moment. For I cannot live without you, and, besides, I would like to go to the good God with you to speak for us both; for oh, I loved you, I loved you, and I love you still, my husband, my adored.’

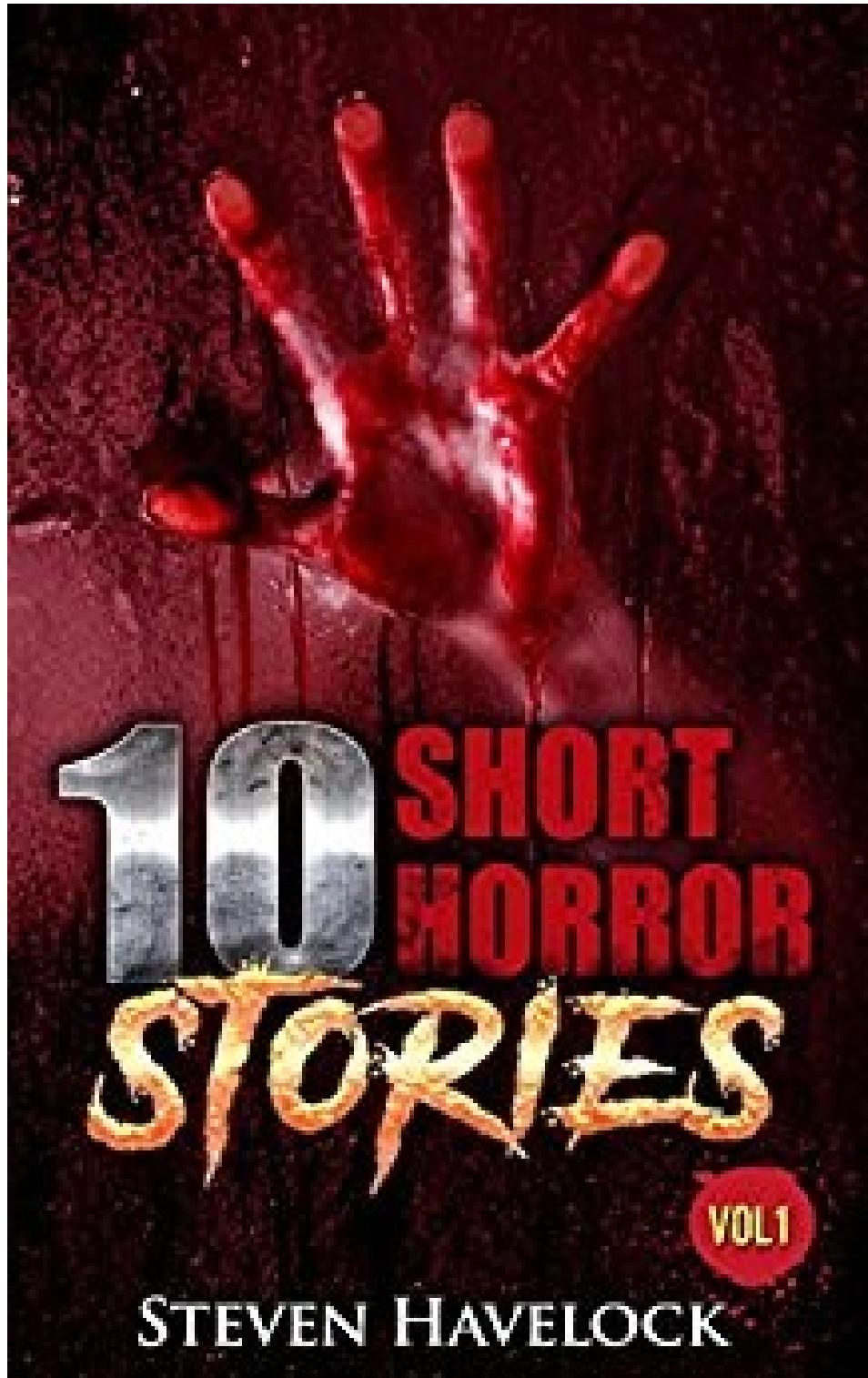
“He stooped—he was so big, and she but of middle height—kissed her, and said, ‘See, my Falise, I am of the same mind. We have been happy in life, and we could well be happy in death together.’ So they sat long, long into the night and talked to each other—of the days they had passed together, of cheerful things, she trying to comfort herself, and he trying to bring smiles to her lips. At last they said good-night, and he lay down in his clothes; and after a few moments she was sleeping like a child. But he could not sleep, for he lay thinking of her and of her life—how she had come from humble things and fitted in with the highest; At last, at break of day, he arose and went outside. He looked up at the hill where Bigot’s two guns were. Men were already stirring there. One man was standing beside the gun, and another not far behind. Of course the Baron could not know that the man behind the gunner said: ‘Yes, you may open the dance with an early salute’; and he smiled up boldly at the hill and went into the house, and stole to the bed of his wife to kiss her before he began the day’s fighting. He looked at her a moment, standing over her, and then stooped and softly put his lips to hers.

“At that moment the gunner up on the hill used the match, and an awful thing happened. With the loud roar the whole hillside of rock and gravel and sand split down, not ten feet in front of the gun, moved with horrible swiftness upon the river, filled its bed, and turned it from its course, and, sweeping on, swallowed the Manor House of Beaugard. There had been a crack in the hill, the water of the river had sapped its foundations, and it needed only this shock to send it down. And twice since that day this same river has been shifted from its course by breaking banks and hills: the last time, but two years ago, as all remember.

“And so, as the woman wished: the same hour for herself and the man. And when at last their prison was opened by the willing hands of Bigot’s men, they were found cheek by cheek, free for ever from all mortal bonds, but bound in the sacred marriage of Death.

“But another had gone the same road, for, at the awful moment, beside the bursted gun, the dying gunner, Garoche, lifted up his head, saw the loose travelling hill, and said with his last breath: ‘The waters drown them, and the hills bury them, and——’. He had his way with them, and after that perhaps the great God had His way with him—eh? —eh?”

THE END



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THE BOARDED WINDOW by Ambrose Bierce

In 1820, only a few miles away from what is now the great city of Cincinnati, lay an immense and almost unbroken forest. The whole region was sparsely settled by people of the frontier—restless souls who no sooner had hewn fairly habitable homes out of the wilderness and attained to that degree of prosperity which today we should call indigence, than, impelled by some mysterious impulse of their nature, they abandoned all and pushed farther westward, to encounter new perils and privations in the effort to regain the meagre comforts which they had voluntarily renounced. Many of them had already forsaken that region for the remoter settlements, but among those remaining was one who had been of those first arriving. He lived alone in a house of logs surrounded on all sides by the great forest, of whose gloom and silence he seemed a part, for no one had ever known him to smile nor speak a needless word. His simple wants were supplied by the sale or barter of skins of wild animals in the river town, for not a thing did he grow upon the land which, if needful, he might have claimed by right of undisturbed possession. There were evidences of “improvement”—a few acres of ground immediately about the house had once been cleared of its trees, the decayed stumps of which were half concealed by the new growth that had been suffered to repair the ravage wrought by the axe. Apparently the man’s zeal for agriculture had burned with a failing flame, expiring in penitential ashes.

The little log house, with its chimney of sticks, its roof of warping clapboards weighted with traversing poles and its “chinking” of clay, had a single door and, directly opposite, a window. The latter, however, was boarded up—nobody could remember a time when it was not. And none knew why it was so closed; certainly not because of the occupant’s dislike of light and air, for on those rare occasions when a hunter had passed that lonely spot the recluse had commonly been seen sunning himself on his doorstep if heaven had provided sunshine for his need. I fancy there are few persons living today who ever knew the secret of that window, but I am one, as you shall see.

The man’s name was said to be Murlock. He was apparently seventy years old, actually about fifty. Something besides years had had a hand in his aging. His hair and long, full beard were white, his grey, lustreless eyes sunken, his face singularly seamed with wrinkles which appeared to belong to two intersecting systems. In figure he was tall and spare, with a stoop of the shoulders—a burden bearer. I never saw him; these particulars I learned from my grandfather, from whom also I got the man’s story when I was a lad. He had known him when living nearby in that early day.

One day, Murlock was found in his cabin, dead. It was not a time and place for coroners and newspapers, and I suppose it was agreed that he had died from natural causes or I should have been told, and should remember. I know only that with what was probably a sense of the fitness of things the body was buried near the cabin, alongside the grave of his wife, who had preceded him by so many years that local tradition had retained hardly a hint of her existence. That closes the final chapter of this true story—excepting, indeed, the circumstance that many years afterward, in company with an equally intrepid spirit, I penetrated to the place and ventured near enough to the ruined cabin to throw a stone against it, and ran away to avoid the ghost which every well-informed boy thereabout knew haunted the spot. But there is an earlier chapter—that supplied by my grandfather.

When Murlock built his cabin and began laying sturdily about with his axe to hew out a farm—the rifle, meanwhile, his means of support—he was young, strong and full of hope. In

that eastern country whence he came he had married, as was the fashion, a young woman in all ways worthy of his honest devotion, who shared the dangers and privations of his lot with a willing spirit and light heart. There is no known record of her name; of her charms of mind and person tradition is silent and the doubter is at liberty to entertain his doubt; but God forbid that I should share it! Of their affection and happiness there is abundant assurance in every added day of the man's widowed life; for what but the magnetism of a blessed memory could have chained that venturesome spirit to a lot like that?

One day, Murlock returned from gunning in a distant part of the forest to find his wife prostrate with fever, and delirious. There was no physician within miles, no neighbour; nor was she in a condition to be left, to summon help. So he set about the task of nursing her back to health, but at the end of the third day she fell into unconsciousness and so passed away, apparently, with never a gleam of returning reason.

From what we know of a nature like his we may venture to sketch in some of the details of the outline picture drawn by my grandfather. When convinced that she was dead, Murlock had sense enough to remember that the dead must be prepared for burial. In performance of this sacred duty he blundered now and again, did certain things incorrectly, and others which he did correctly were done over and over. His occasional failures to accomplish some simple and ordinary act filled him with astonishment, like that of a drunken man who wonders at the suspension of familiar natural laws. He was surprised, too, that he did not weep—surprised and a little ashamed; surely it is unkind not to weep for the dead. "Tomorrow," he said aloud, "I shall have to make the coffin and dig the grave; and then I shall miss her, when she is no longer in sight; but now—she is dead, of course, but it is all right—it must be all right, somehow. Things cannot be so bad as they seem."

He stood over the body in the fading light, adjusting the hair and putting the finishing touches to the simple toilet, doing all mechanically, with soulless care. And still through his consciousness ran an undersense of conviction that all was right—that he should have her again as before, and everything explained. He had had no experience in grief; his capacity had not been enlarged by use. His heart could not contain it all, nor his imagination rightly conceive it. He did not know he was so hard struck; that knowledge would come later, and never go. Grief is an artist of powers as various as the instruments upon which he plays his dirges for the dead, evoking from some the sharpest, shrillest notes, from others the low, grave chords that throb recurrent like the slow beating of a distant drum. Some natures it startles; some it stupefies. To one it comes like the stroke of an arrow, stinging all the sensibilities to a keener life; to another as the blow of a bludgeon, which in crushing benumbs. We may conceive Murlock to have been that way affected, for (and here we are upon surer ground than that of conjecture) no sooner had he finished his pious work than, sinking into a chair by the side of the table upon which the body lay, and noting how white the profile showed in the deepening gloom, he laid his arms upon the table's edge, and dropped his face into them, tearless yet and unutterably weary. At that moment came in through the open window a long, wailing sound like the cry of a lost child in the far deeps of the darkening woods! But the man did not move. Again, and nearer than before, sounded that unearthly cry upon his failing sense. Perhaps it was a wild beast; perhaps it was a dream. For Murlock was asleep.

Some hours later, as it afterward appeared, this unfaithful watcher awoke and lifting his head from his arms intently listened—he knew not why. There in the black darkness by the side of the dead, recalling all without a shock, he strained his eyes to see—he knew not what. His

senses were all alert, his breath was suspended, his blood had stilled its tides as if to assist the silence. Who—what had waked him, and where was it?

Suddenly the table shook beneath his arms, and at the same moment he heard, or fancied that he heard, a light, soft step—another—sounds as of bare feet upon the floor!

He was terrified beyond the power to cry out or move. Perforce he waited—waited there in the darkness through seeming centuries of such dread as one may know, yet live to tell. He tried vainly to speak the dead woman's name, vainly to stretch forth his hand across the table to learn if she were there. His throat was powerless, his arms and hands were like lead. Then occurred something most frightful. Some heavy body seemed hurled against the table with an impetus that pushed it against his breast so sharply as nearly to overthrow him, and at the same instant he heard and felt the fall of something upon the floor with so violent a thump that the whole house was shaken by the impact. A scuffling ensued, and a confusion of sounds impossible to describe. Murlock had risen to his feet. Fear had by excess forfeited control of his faculties. He flung his hands upon the table. Nothing was there!

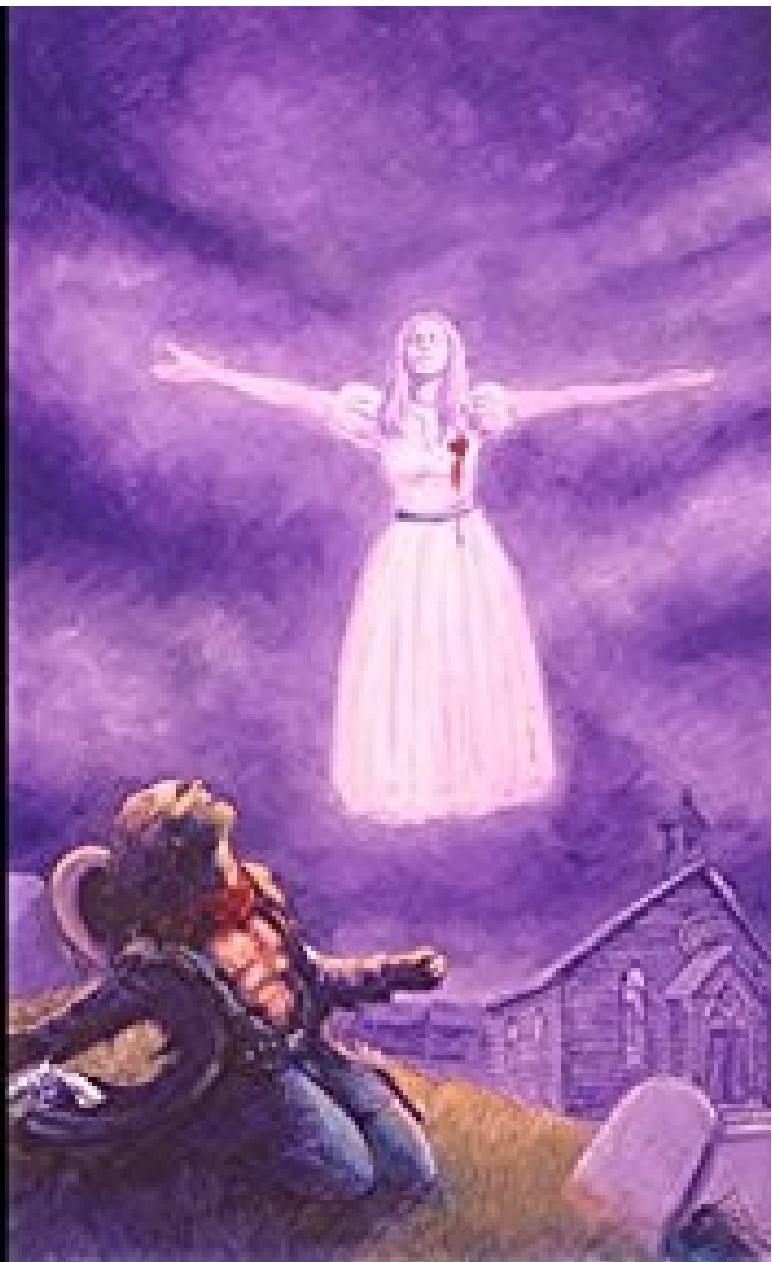
There is a point at which terror may turn to madness; and madness incites to action. With no definite intent, from no motive but the wayward impulse of a madman, Murlock sprang to the wall, with a little groping seized his loaded rifle, and without aim discharged it. By the flash which lit up the room with a vivid illumination, he saw an enormous panther dragging the dead woman toward the window, its teeth fixed in her throat! Then there was darkness blacker than before, and silence; and when he returned to consciousness the sun was high and the wood vocal with songs of birds.

The body lay near the window, where the beast had left it when frightened away by the flash and report of the rifle. The clothing was deranged, the long hair in disorder, the limbs lay anyhow. From the throat, dreadfully lacerated, had issued a pool of blood not yet entirely coagulated. The ribbon with which he had bound the wrists was broken; the hands were tightly clenched. Between the teeth was a fragment of the animal's ear.

THE END

[Schlock! Presents: Ghostlands](#)

Ghostlands



A Book of Ghost Stories

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THE BOOK OF GHOSTS by Sabine Baring-Gould

Jean Bouchon

I was in Orléans a good many years ago. At the time it was my purpose to write a life of Joan of Arc, and I considered it advisable to visit the scenes of her exploits, so as to be able to give to my narrative some local colour.

But I did not find Orléans answer to my expectations. It is a dull town, very modern in appearance, but with that measly and decrepit look which is so general in French towns. There was a Place Jeanne d'Arc, with an equestrian statue of her in the midst, flourishing a banner. There was the house that the Maid had occupied after the taking of the city, but, with the exception of the walls and rafters, it had undergone so much alteration and modernisation as to have lost its interest. A museum of memorials of la Pucelle had been formed, but possessed no genuine relics, only arms and tapestries of a later date.

The city walls she had besieged, the gate through which she had burst, had been levelled, and their places taken by boulevards. The very cathedral in which she had knelt to return thanks for her victory was not the same. That had been blown up by the Huguenots, and the cathedral that now stands was erected on its ruins in 1601.

There was an enormous figure of Jeanne on the clock—never wound up—upon the mantelshelf in my room at the hotel, and there were chocolate figures of her in the confectioners' shop- windows for children to suck. When I sat down at 7 p.m. to table d'hôte, at my inn, I was out of heart. The result of my exploration of sites had been unsatisfactory; but I trusted on the morrow to be able to find material to serve my purpose in the municipal archives of the town library.

My dinner ended, I sauntered to a cafe.

That I selected opened on to the Place, but there was a back entrance near to my hotel, leading through a long, stone-paved passage at the back of the houses in the street, and by ascending three or four stone steps one entered the long, well-lighted café. I came into it from the back by this means, and not from the front.

I took my place and called for a café-cognac. Then I picked up a French paper and proceeded to read it—all but the feuilleton. In my experience I have never yet come across anyone who reads the feuilletons in a French paper; and my impression is that these snippets of novel are printed solely for the purpose of filling up space and disguising the lack of news at the disposal of the editors. The French papers borrow their information relative to foreign affairs largely from the English journals, so that they are a day behind ours in the foreign news that they publish.

Whilst I was engaged in reading, something caused me to look up, and I noticed standing by the white marble-topped table, on which was my coffee, a waiter, with a pale face and black whiskers, in an expectant attitude.

I was a little nettled at his precipitancy in applying for payment, but I put it down to my being a total stranger there; and without a word I set down half a franc and a ten centimes coin, the latter as his pourbaire. Then I proceeded with my reading.

I think a quarter of an hour had elapsed, when I rose to depart, and then, to my surprise, I noticed the half-franc still on the table, but the sous piece was gone.

I beckoned to a waiter, and said: ‘One of you came to me a little while ago demanding payment. I think he was somewhat hasty in pressing for it; however, I set the money down, and the fellow has taken the tip, and has neglected the charge for the coffee.’

“Sapristi!” exclaimed the garçon; ‘Jean Bouchon has at his tricks again.’ I said nothing further; asked no questions. The matter did not concern me, or indeed interest me in the smallest degree; and I left.

Next day I worked hard in the town library. I cannot say that I lighted on any unpublished documents that might serve my purpose.

I had to go through the controversial literature relative to whether Jeanne d’Arc was burnt or not, for it has been maintained that a person of the same name, and also of Arques, died a natural death some time later, and who postured as the original warrior-maid. I read a good many monographs on the Pucelle, of various values; some real contributions to history, others mere second-hand cookings-up of well-known and often-used material. The sauce in these latter was all that was new.

In the evening, after dinner, I went back to the same café and called for black coffee with a nip of brandy. I drank it leisurely, and then retreated to the desk where I could write some letters.

I had finished one, and was folding it, when I saw the same pale-visaged waiter standing by with his hand extended for payment. I put my hand into my pocket, pulled out a fifty centimes piece and a coin of two sous, and placed both beside me, near the man, and proceeded to put my letter in an envelope, which I then directed.

Next I wrote a second letter, and that concluded, I rose to go to one of the tables and to call for stamps, when I noticed that again the silver coin had been left untouched, but the copper piece had been taken away.

I tapped for a waiter. “Tiens,” said I, “that fellow of yours has been bungling again. He has taken the tip and has left the half-franc.”

“Ah! Jean Bouchon once more!”

“But who is Jean Bouchon?”

The man shrugged his shoulders, and, instead of answering my query, said: “I should recommend monsieur to refuse to pay Jean Bouchon again—that is, supposing monsieur intends revisiting this café.”

“I most assuredly will not pay such a noodle,” I said; “and it passes my comprehension how you can keep such a fellow on your staff”

I revisited the library next day, and then walked by the Loire, that rolls in winter such a full and turbid stream, and in summer, with a reduced flood, exposes gravel and sand-banks. I wandered around the town, and endeavoured vainly to picture it, enclosed by walls and drums of towers, when on April 29th, 1429, Jeanne threw herself into the town and forced the English to retire, discomfited and perplexed.

In the evening I revisited the café and made my wants known as before. Then I looked at my notes, and began to arrange them.

Whilst thus engaged I observed the waiter, named Jean Bouchon, standing near the table in an expectant attitude as before. I now looked him full in the face and observed his countenance. He had puffy white cheeks, small black eyes, thick dark mutton-chop whiskers, and a broken nose. He was decidedly an ugly man, but not a man with a repulsive expression of face.

“No,” said I, “I will give you nothing. I will not pay you. Send another garçon to me.” As I looked at him to see how he took this refusal, he seemed to fall back out of my range, or, to be more exact, the lines of his form and features became confused. It was much as though I had been gazing on a reflection in still water; that something had ruffled the surface, and all was broken up and obliterated. I could see him no more. I was puzzled and a bit startled, and I rapped my coffee-cup with the spoon to call the attention of a waiter. One sprang to me immediately.

“See!” said I, “Jean Bouchon has been here again; I told him that I would not pay him one sou, and he has vanished in a most perplexing manner. I do not see him in the room.”

“No, he is not in the room.”

“When he comes in again, send him to me. I want to have a word with him.” The waiter looked confused, and replied: “I do not think that Jean will return.”

“How long has he been on your staff?”

“Oh! he has not been on our staff for some years.”

“Then why does he come here and ask for payment for coffee and what else one may order?”

“He never takes payment for anything that has been consumed. He takes only the tips.”

“But why do you permit him to do that?”

“We cannot help ourselves.”

“He should not be allowed to enter the café.”

“No one can keep him out.”

“This is surpassing strange. He has no right to the tips. You should communicate with the police.”

The waiter shook his head. “They can do nothing. Jean Bouchon died in 1869.”

“Died in 1869!” I repeated.

“It is so. But he still comes here. He never pesters the old customers, the inhabitants of the town—only visitors, strangers.”

“Tell me all about him.”

Monsieur must pardon me now. We have many in the place, and I have my duties.”

“In that case I will drop in here to-morrow morning when you are disengaged, and I will ask you to inform me about him. What is your name?”

“At monsieur’s pleasure—Alphonse.”

Next morning, in place of pursuing the traces of the Maid of Orleans, I went to the café to hunt up Jean Bouchon. I found Alphonse with a duster wiping down the tables. I invited him to a table and made him sit down opposite me. I will give his story in substance, only where advisable recording his exact words.

Jean Bouchon had been a waiter at this particular café. Now in some of these establishments the attendants are wont to have a box, into which they drop all the tips that are received; and at the end of the week it is opened, and the sum found in it is divided pro rata among the waiters, the head waiter receiving a larger portion than the others. This is not customary in all such places of refreshment, but it is in some, and it was so in this café. The average is pretty constant, except on special occasions, as when a fête occurs; and the waiters know within a few francs what their perquisites will be.

But in the café where served Jean Bouchon the sum did not reach the weekly total that might have been anticipated; and after this deficit had been noted for a couple of months the waiters were convinced that there was something wrong, somewhere or somehow. Either the common box was tampered with, or one of them did not put in his tips received. A watch was set, and it was discovered that Jean Bouchon was the defaulter. When he had received a gratuity, he went to the box, and pretended to put in the coin, but no sound followed, as would have been the case had one been dropped in.

There ensued, of course, a great commotion among the waiters when this was discovered. Jean Bouchon endeavoured to brave it out, but the patron was appealed to, the case stated, and he was dismissed. As he left by the back entrance, one of the younger garçons put out his leg and tripped Bouchon up, so that he stumbled and fell headlong down the steps with a crash on the stone floor of the passage. He fell with such violence on his forehead that he was taken up insensible. His bones were fractured, there was concussion of the brain, and he died within a few hours without recovering consciousness.

“We were all very sorry and greatly shocked,” said “we did not like the man, he had dealt dishonourably by us, but we wished him no ill, and our resentment was at an end when he was dead. The waiter who had tripped him up was arrested, and was sent to prison for some months, but the accident was due to *une mauvaise plaisanterie* and no malice was in it, so that the young fellow got off with a light sentence. He afterwards married a widow with a café at Vierzon, and is there, I believe, doing well.

"Jean Bouchon was buried," continued Alphonse; "and we waiters attended the funeral and held white kerchiefs to our eyes. Our head waiter even put a lemon into his, that by squeezing it he might draw tears from his eyes. We all subscribed for the interment, that it should be dignified—majestic as becomes a waiter."

"And do you mean to tell me that Jean Bouchon has haunted this café ever since?"

"Ever since 1869," replied Alphonse.

"And there is no way of getting rid of him?"

"None at all, monsieur. One of the Canons of Bourges came in here one evening. We did suppose that Jean Bouchon would not approach, molest an ecclesiastic, but he did. He took his pourboire and left the rest, just as he treated monsieur. Ah! monsieur! but Jean Bouchon did well in 1870 and 1871 when those pigs of Prussians were here in occupation. The officers came nightly to our café, and Jean Bouchon was greatly on the alert. He must have carried away half of the gratuities they offered. It was a sad loss to us."

"This is a very extraordinary story," said I.

"But it is true," replied Alphonse.

Next day I left Orléans. I gave up the notion of writing the life of Joan of Arc, as I found that there was absolutely no new material to be gleaned on her history—in fact, she had been thrashed out.

Years passed, and I had almost forgotten about Jean Bouchon, when, the other day, I was in Orleans once more, on my way south, and at once the whole story recurred to me.

I went that evening to the same café. It had been smartened up since I was there before. There was more plate glass, more gilding; electric light had been introduced, there were more mirrors, and there were also ornaments that had not been in the café before.

I called for café-cognac and looked at a journal, but turned my eyes on one side occasionally, on the look-out for Jean Bouchon. But he did not put in an appearance. I waited for a quarter of an hour in expectation, but saw no sign of him.

Presently I summoned a waiter, and when he came up I inquired: "But where is Jean Bouchon?"

"Monsieur asks after Jean Bouchon?" The man looked surprised.

"Yes, I have seen him here previously. Where is he at present?"

"Monsieur has seen Jean Bouchon? Monsieur perhaps knew him. He died in 1869."

"I know that he died in 1869, but I made his acquaintance in 1874. I saw him then thrice, and he accepted some small gratuities of me."

“Monsieur tipped Jean Bouchon?”

“Yes, and Jean Bouchon accepted my tips.”

“Tiens, and Jean Bouchon died five years before.”

“Yes, and what I want to know is how you have rid yourselves of Jean Bouchon, for that you have cleared the place of him is evident, or he would have been pestering me this evening.”
The man looked disconcerted and irresolute.

“Hold,” said I; “is Alphonse here?”

“No, monsieur, Alphonse has left two or three years ago. And monsieur saw Jean Bouchon in 1874. I was not then here. I have been here only six years.”

“But you can in all probability inform me of the manner of getting quit of Jean.”

“Monsieur! I am very busy this evening, there are so many gentlemen come in.”

“I will give you five francs if you will tell me all—all—succinctly about Jean Bouchon.”

“Will monsieur be so good as to come here to-morrow during the morning? and then I place myself at the disposition of monsieur.”

“I shall be here at eleven o’clock.”

At the appointed time I was at the café. If there is an institution that looks ragged and dejected and dissipated, it is a café in the morning, when the chairs are turned upside-down, the waiters are in aprons and shirt-sleeves, and a smell of stale tobacco lurks about the air, mixed with various other unpleasant odours.

The waiter I had spoken to on the previous evening was looking out for me. I made him seat himself at a table with me. No one else was in the saloon except another garçon, who was dusting with a long feather-brush.

“Monsieur,” began the waiter, “I will tell you the whole truth. The story is curious, and perhaps everyone would not believe it, but it is well documented. Jean Bouchon was at one time in service here. We had a box. When I say we, I do not mean myself included, for I was not here at the time.”

“I know about the common box. I know the story down to my visit to Orleans in 1874, when I saw the man.”

“Monsieur has perhaps been informed that he was buried in the cemetery?”

“I do know that, at the cost of his fellow-waiters.”

“Well, monsieur, he was poor, and his fellow-waiters, though well-disposed, were not rich. So he did not have a grave en perpétuité. Accordingly, after many years, when the term of consignment was expired, and it might well be supposed that Jean Bouchon had mouldered

away, his grave was cleared out to make room for a fresh occupant. Then a very remarkable discovery was made. It was found that his corroded coffin was crammed—literally stuffed—with five and ten centimes pieces, and with them were also some German coins, no doubt received from those pigs of Prussians during the occupation of Orleans. This discovery was much talked about. Our proprietor of the café and the head waiter went to the mayor and represented to him how matters stood—that all this money had been filched during a series of years since 1869 from the waiters. And our patron represented to him that it should in all propriety and justice be restored to us. The mayor was a man of intelligence and heart, and he quite accepted this view of the matter, and ordered the surrender of the whole coffin-load of coins to us, the waiters of the café.”

“So you divided it amongst you.”

“Pardon, monsieur; we did not. It is true that the money might legitimately be regarded as belonging to us. But then those defrauded, or most of them, had left long ago, and there were among us some who had not been in service in the café more than a year or eighteen months. We could not trace the old waiters. Some were dead, some had married and left this part of the

country. We were not a corporation. So we held a meeting to discuss what was to be done with the money. We feared, moreover, that unless the spirit of Jean Bouchon were satisfied, he might continue revisiting the café and go on sweeping away the tips. It was of paramount importance to please Jean Bouchon, to lay out the money in such a manner as would commend itself to his feelings. One suggested one thing, one another. One proposed that the sum should be expended on masses for the repose of Jean’s soul. But the head waiter objected to that. He said that he thought he knew the mind of Jean Bouchon, and that this would not commend itself to it. He said, did our head waiter, that he knew Jean Bouchon from head to heels. And he proposed that all the coins should be melted up, and that out of them should be cast a statue of Jean Bouchon in bronze, to be set up here in the café, as there were not enough coins to make one large enough to be erected in a Place. If monsieur will step with me he will see the statue; it is a superb work of art.”

He led the way, and I followed.

In the midst of the café stood a pedestals and on this basis a bronze figure about four feet high. It represented a man reeling backward, with a banner in his left hand, and the right raised towards his brow, as though he had been struck there by a bullet. A sabre, apparently fallen from his grasp, lay at his feet. I studied the face, and it most assuredly was utterly unlike Jean Bouchon with his puffy cheeks, mutton-chop whiskers, and broken nose, as I recalled him.

“But,” said I, “the features do not—pardon me—at all resemble those of Jean Bouchon. This might be the young Augustus, or Napoleon I. The profile is quite Greek.”

“It may be so,” replied the waiter. “But we had no photograph to go by. We had to allow the artist to exercise his genius, and, above all, we had to gratify the spirit of Jean Bouchon.”

“I see. But the attitude is inexact. Jean Bouchon fell down the steps headlong, and this represents a man staggering backwards.”

"It would have been inartistic to have shown him precipitated forwards; besides, the spirit of Jean might not have liked it."

"Quite so. I understand. But the flag?"

"That was an idea of the artist. Jean could not be made holding a coffee-cup. You will see the whole makes a superb subject. Art has its exigencies. Monsieur will see underneath is an inscription on the pedestal."

I stooped, and with some astonishment read—

"JEAN BOUCHON
MORT SUR LE CHAMP DR GLOIRE 1870
DULCE ET DECORUM EST PRO PATRIA MORI."

"Why!" objected I, "he died from falling a cropper in the back passage, not on the field of glory."

"Monsieur! all Orleans is a field of glory. Under S. Aignan did we not repel Attila and his Huns in 451? Under Jeanne d'Arc did we not repulse the English—monsieur will excuse the allusion—in 1429. Did we not recapture Orleans from the Germans in November 1870?"

"That is all very true," I broke in. "But Jean Bouchon neither fought against Attila nor with la Pucelle, nor against the Prussians. Then 'Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori' is rather strong, considering the facts."

"How? Does not monsieur see that the sentiment is patriotic and magnificent?"

"I admit that, but dispute the application."

"Then why apply it? The sentiment is all right."

"But by implication it refers to Jean Bouchon, who died, not for his country, but in a sordid coffee-house brawl. Then, again, the date is wrong. Jean Bouchon died in 1869, not in 1870."

"That is only out by a year."

"Yes, but with this mistake of a year, and with the quotation from Horace, and with the attitude given to the figure, anyone would suppose that Jean Bouchon had fallen in the retaking of Orleans from the Prussians."

"Ah! monsieur, who looks on a monument and expects to find thereon the literal truth relative to the deceased?"

"This is something of a sacrifice to truth," I demurred.

"Sacrifice is superb!" said the waiter. "There is nothing more noble, more heroic than sacrifice."

"But not the sacrifice of truth."

“Sacrifice is always sacrifice.”

“Well,” said I, unwilling further to dispute, “this is certainly a great creation out of nothing”

“Not out of nothing; out of the coppers that Jean Bouchon had filched from us, and which choked up his coffin.”

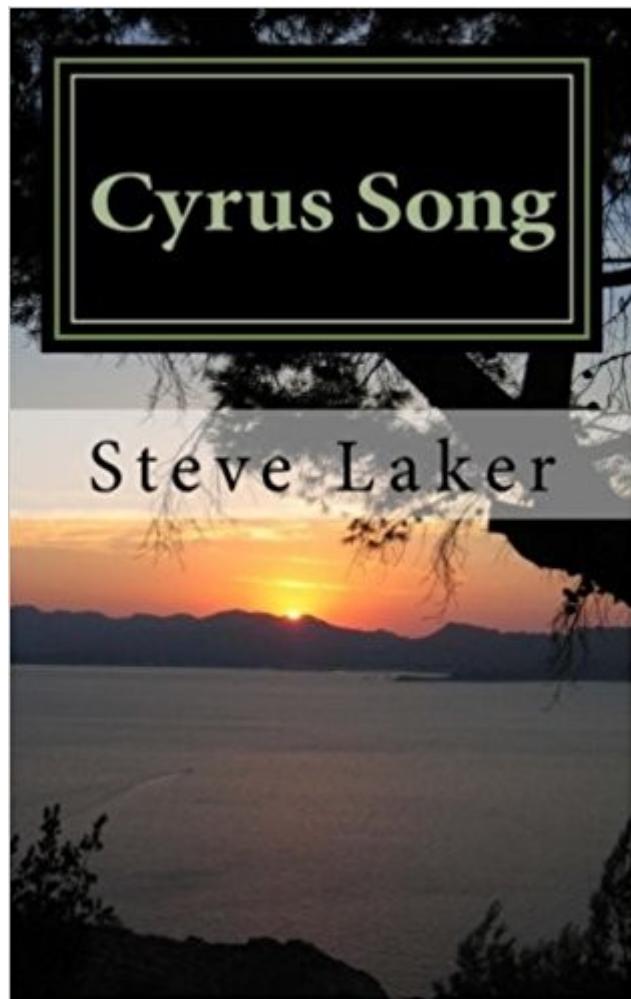
“Jean Bouchon has been seen no more?”

“No, monsieur. And yet—yes, once, when the statue was unveiled. Our patron did that. The café was crowded. All our habitués were there. The patron made a magnificent oration; he drew a superb picture of the moral, intellectual, social, and political merits of Jean Bouchon. There was not a dry eye among the audience, and the speaker choked with emotion. Then, as we stood in a ring, not too near, we saw—I was there and I distinctly saw, so did the others—Jean Bouchon standing with his back to us, looking intently at the statue of himself.

Monsieur, as he thus stood I could discern his black mutton-chop whiskers projecting upon each side of his head. Well, sir, not one word was spoken. A dead silence fell upon all. Our patron ceased to speak, and wiped his eyes and blew his nose. A sort of holy awe possessed us all. Then, after the lapse of some minutes, Jean Bouchon turned himself about, and we all saw his puffy pale cheeks, his thick sensual lips, his broken nose, his little pig’s eyes. He was very unlike his idealised portrait in the statue; but what matters that? It gratified the deceased, and it injured no one. Well, monsieur, Jean Bouchon stood facing us, and he turned his head from one side to another, and gave us all what I may term a greasy smile. Then he lifted up his hands as though invoking a blessing on us all, and vanished. Since then he has not been seen.”

THE END

[Cyrus Song](#)



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NOTES ON WRITING WEIRD FICTION by HP Lovecraft

My reason for writing stories is to give myself the satisfaction of visualising more clearly and detailedly and stably the vague, elusive, fragmentary impressions of wonder, beauty, and adventurous expectancy which are conveyed to me by certain sights (scenic, architectural, atmospheric, etc.), ideas, occurrences, and images encountered in art and literature. I choose weird stories because they suit my inclination best—one of my strongest and most persistent wishes being to achieve, momentarily, the illusion of some strange suspension or violation of the galling limitations of time, space, and natural law which forever imprison us and frustrate our curiosity about the infinite cosmic spaces beyond the radius of our sight and analysis. These stories frequently emphasise the element of horror because fear is our deepest and strongest emotion, and the one which best lends itself to the creation of Nature-defying illusions. Horror and the unknown or the strange are always closely connected, so that it is hard to create a convincing picture of shattered natural law or cosmic alienage or “outsideness” without laying stress on the emotion of fear. The reason why time plays a great part in so many of my tales is that this element looms up in my mind as the most profoundly dramatic and grimly terrible thing in the universe. Conflict with time seems to me the most potent and fruitful theme in all human expression.

While my chosen form of story-writing is obviously a special and perhaps a narrow one, it is none the less a persistent and permanent type of expression, as old as literature itself. There will always be a certain small percentage of persons who feel a burning curiosity about unknown outer space, and a burning desire to escape from the prison-house of the known and the real into those enchanted lands of incredible adventure and infinite possibilities which dreams open up to us, and which things like deep woods, fantastic urban towers, and flaming sunsets momentarily suggest. These persons include great authors as well as insignificant amateurs like myself—Dunsany, Poe, Arthur Machen, M. R. James, Algernon Blackwood, and Walter de la Mare being typical masters in this field.

As to how I write a story—there is no one way. Each one of my tales has a different history. Once or twice I have literally written out a dream; but usually I start with a mood or idea or image which I wish to express, and revolve it in my mind until I can think of a good way of embodying it in some chain of dramatic occurrences capable of being recorded in concrete terms. I tend to run through a mental list of the basic conditions or situations best adapted to such a mood or idea or image, and then begin to speculate on logical and naturally motivated explanations of the given mood or idea or image in terms of the basic condition or situation chosen.

The actual process of writing is of course as varied as the choice of theme and initial conception; but if the history of all my tales were analysed, it is just possible that the following set of rules might be deduced from the average procedure:

1. Prepare a synopsis or scenario of events in the order of their absolute occurrence—not the order of their narration. Describe with enough fulness to cover all vital points and motivate all incidents planned. Details, comments, and estimates of consequences are sometimes desirable in this temporary framework.
2. Prepare a second synopsis or scenario of events—this one in order of narration (not actual occurrence), with ample fulness and detail, and with notes as to changing perspective, stresses, and climax. Change the original synopsis to fit if such a change will increase the

dramatic force or general effectiveness of the story. Interpolate or delete incidents at will—never being bound by the original conception even if the ultimate result be a tale wholly different from that first planned. Let additions and alterations be made whenever suggested by anything in the formulating process.

3. Write out the story—rapidly, fluently, and not too critically—following the second or narrative-order synopsis. Change incidents and plot whenever the developing process seems to suggest such change, never being bound by any previous design. If the development suddenly reveals new opportunities for dramatic effect or vivid storytelling, add whatever is thought advantageous—going back and reconciling the early parts to the new plan. Insert and delete whole sections if necessary or desirable, trying different beginnings and endings until the best arrangement is found. But be sure that all references throughout the story are thoroughly reconciled with the final design. Remove all possible superfluities—words, sentences, paragraphs, or whole episodes or elements—observing the usual precautions about the reconciling of all references.

4. Revise the entire text, paying attention to vocabulary, syntax, rhythm of prose, proportioning of parts, niceties of tone, grace and convincingness of transitions (scene to scene, slow and detailed action to rapid and sketchy time-covering action and vice versa... etc., etc., etc.), effectiveness of beginning, ending, climaxes, etc., dramatic suspense and interest, plausibility and atmosphere, and various other elements.

5. Prepare a neatly typed copy—not hesitating to add final revisory touches where they seem in order.

The first of these stages is often purely a mental one—a set of conditions and happenings being worked out in my head, and never set down until I am ready to prepare a detailed synopsis of events in order of narration. Then, too, I sometimes begin even the actual writing before I know how I shall develop the idea—this beginning forming a problem to be motivated and exploited.

There are, I think, four distinct types of weird story; one expressing a mood or feeling, another expressing a pictorial conception, a third expressing a general situation, condition, legend or intellectual conception, and a fourth explaining a definite tableau or specific dramatic situation or climax. In another way, weird tales may be grouped into two rough categories—those in which the marvel or horror concerns some condition or phenomenon, and those in which it concerns some action of persons in connexion with a bizarre condition or phenomenon.

Each weird story—to speak more particularly of the horror type—seems to involve five definite elements: (a) some basic, underlying horror or abnormality—condition, entity, etc.—, (b) the general effects or bearings of the horror, (c) the mode of manifestation—object embodying the horror and phenomena observed—, (d) the types of fear-reaction pertaining to the horror, and (e) the specific effects of the horror in relation to the given set of conditions.

In writing a weird story I always try very carefully to achieve the right mood and atmosphere, and place the emphasis where it belongs. One cannot, except in immature pulp charlatan-fiction, present an account of impossible, improbable, or inconceivable phenomena as a commonplace narrative of objective acts and conventional emotions. Inconceivable events and conditions have a special handicap to overcome, and this can be accomplished only

through the maintenance of a careful realism in every phase of the story except that touching on the one given marvel. This marvel must be treated very impressively and deliberately—with a careful emotional “build-up”—else it will seem flat and unconvincing. Being the principal thing in the story, its mere existence should overshadow the characters and events. But the characters and events must be consistent and natural except where they touch the single marvel. In relation to the central wonder, the characters should shew the same overwhelming emotion which similar characters would shew toward such a wonder in real life. Never have a wonder taken for granted. Even when the characters are supposed to be accustomed to the wonder I try to weave an air of awe and impressiveness corresponding to what the reader should feel. A casual style ruins any serious fantasy.

Atmosphere, not action, is the great desideratum of weird fiction. Indeed, all that a wonder story can ever be is a vivid picture of a certain type of human mood. The moment it tries to be anything else it becomes cheap, puerile, and unconvincing. Prime emphasis should be given to subtle suggestion—imperceptible hints and touches of selective associative detail which express shadings of moods and build up a vague illusion of the strange reality of the unreal. Avoid bald catalogues of incredible happenings which can have no substance or meaning apart from a sustaining cloud of colour and symbolism.

These are the rules or standards which I have followed—consciously or unconsciously—ever since I first attempted the serious writing of fantasy. That my results are successful may well be disputed—but I feel at least sure that, had I ignored the considerations mentioned in the last few paragraphs, they would have been much worse than they are.

THE END

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IN THE VAULT by HP Lovecraft

There is nothing more absurd, as I view it, than that conventional association of the homely and the wholesome which seems to pervade the psychology of the multitude. Mention a bucolic Yankee setting, a bungling and thick-fibred village undertaker, and a careless mishap in a tomb, and no average reader can be brought to expect more than a hearty albeit grotesque phase of comedy. God knows, though, that the prosy tale which George Birch's death permits me to tell has in it aspects beside which some of our darkest tragedies are light.

Birch acquired a limitation and changed his business in 1881, yet never discussed the case when he could avoid it. Neither did his old physician Dr. Davis, who died years ago. It was generally stated that the affliction and shock were results of an unlucky slip whereby Birch had locked himself for nine hours in the receiving tomb of Peck Valley Cemetery, escaping only by crude and disastrous mechanical means; but while this much was undoubtedly true, there were other and blacker things which the man used to whisper to me in his drunken delirium toward the last. He confided in me because I was his doctor, and because he probably felt the need of confiding in someone else after Davis died. He was a bachelor, wholly without relatives.

Birch, before 1881, had been the village undertaker of Peck Valley; and was a very calloused and primitive specimen even as such specimens go. The practices I heard attributed to him would be unbelievable today, at least in a city; and even Peck Valley would have shuddered a bit had it known the easy ethics of its mortuary artist in such debatable matters as the ownership of costly "laying-out" apparel invisible beneath the casket's lid, and the degree of dignity to be maintained in posing and adapting the unseen members of lifeless tenants to containers not always calculated with sublimest accuracy. Most distinctly Birch was lax, insensitive, and professionally undesirable; yet I still think he was not an evil man. He was merely crass of fibre and function—thoughtless, careless, and liquorish, as his easily avoidable accident proves, and without that modicum of imagination which holds the average citizen within certain limits fixed by taste.

Just where to begin Birch's story I can hardly decide, since I am no practiced teller of tales. I suppose one should start in the cold December of 1880, when the ground froze and the cemetery delvers found they could dig no more graves till spring. Fortunately the village was small and the death rate low, so that it was possible to give all of Birch's inanimate charges a temporary haven in the single antiquated receiving tomb. The undertaker grew doubly lethargic in the bitter weather, and seemed to outdo even himself in carelessness. Never did he knock together flimsier and ungainlier caskets, or disregard more flagrantly the needs of the rusty lock on the tomb door which he slammed open and shut with such nonchalant abandon.

At last the spring thaw came, and graves were laboriously prepared for the nine silent harvests of the grim reaper which waited in the tomb. Birch, though dreading the bother of removal and interment, began his task of transference one disagreeable April morning, but ceased before noon because of a heavy rain that seemed to irritate his horse, after having laid but one mortal tenement to its permanent rest. That was Darius Peck, the nonagenarian, whose grave was not far from the tomb. Birch decided that he would begin the next day with little old Matthew Fenner, whose grave was also nearby; but actually postponed the matter for three days, not getting to work till Good Friday, the 15th. Being without superstition, he did not heed the day at all; though ever afterward he refused to do anything of importance on

that fateful sixth day of the week. Certainly, the events of that evening greatly changed George Birch.

On the afternoon of Friday, April 15th, then, Birch set out for the tomb with horse and wagon to transfer the body of Matthew Fenner. That he was not perfectly sober, he subsequently admitted; though he had not then taken to the wholesale drinking by which he later tried to forget certain things. He was just dizzy and careless enough to annoy his sensitive horse, which as he drew it viciously up at the tomb neighed and pawed and tossed its head, much as on that former occasion when the rain had vexed it. The day was clear, but a high wind had sprung up; and Birch was glad to get to shelter as he unlocked the iron door and entered the side-hill vault. Another might not have relished the damp, odorous chamber with the eight carelessly placed coffins; but Birch in those days was insensitive, and was concerned only in getting the right coffin for the right grave. He had not forgotten the criticism aroused when Hannah Bixby's relatives, wishing to transport her body to the cemetery in the city whither they had moved, found the casket of Judge Capwell beneath her headstone.

The light was dim, but Birch's sight was good, and he did not get Asaph Sawyer's coffin by mistake, although it was very similar. He had, indeed, made that coffin for Matthew Fenner; but had cast it aside at last as too awkward and flimsy, in a fit of curious sentimentality aroused by recalling how kindly and generous the little old man had been to him during his bankruptcy five years before. He gave old Matt the very best his skill could produce, but was thrifty enough to save the rejected specimen, and to use it when Asaph Sawyer died of a malignant fever. Sawyer was not a lovable man, and many stories were told of his almost inhuman vindictiveness and tenacious memory for wrongs real or fancied. To him Birch had felt no compunction in assigning the carelessly made coffin which he now pushed out of the way in his quest for the Fenner casket.

It was just as he had recognised old Matt's coffin that the door slammed to in the wind, leaving him in a dusk even deeper than before. The narrow transom admitted only the feeblest of rays, and the overhead ventilation funnel virtually none at all; so that he was reduced to a profane fumbling as he made his halting way among the long boxes toward the latch. In this funereal twilight he rattled the rusty handles, pushed at the iron panels, and wondered why the massive portal had grown so suddenly recalcitrant. In this twilight too, he began to realise the truth and to shout loudly as if his horse outside could do more than neigh an unsympathetic reply. For the long-neglected latch was obviously broken, leaving the careless undertaker trapped in the vault, a victim of his own oversight.

The thing must have happened at about three-thirty in the afternoon. Birch, being by temperament phlegmatic and practical, did not shout long; but proceeded to grope about for some tools which he recalled seeing in a corner of the tomb. It is doubtful whether he was touched at all by the horror and exquisite weirdness of his position, but the bald fact of imprisonment so far from the daily paths of men was enough to exasperate him thoroughly. His day's work was sadly interrupted, and unless chance presently brought some rambler hither, he might have to remain all night or longer. The pile of tools soon reached, and a hammer and chisel selected, Birch returned over the coffins to the door. The air had begun to be exceedingly unwholesome; but to this detail he paid no attention as he toiled, half by feeling, at the heavy and corroded metal of the latch. He would have given much for a lantern or bit of candle; but lacking these, bungled semi-sightlessly as best he might.

When he perceived that the latch was hopelessly unyielding, at least to such meagre tools and under such tenebrous conditions as these, Birch glanced about for other possible points of escape. The vault had been dug from a hillside, so that the narrow ventilation funnel in the top ran through several feet of earth, making this direction utterly useless to consider. Over the door, however, the high, slit-like transom in the brick facade gave promise of possible enlargement to a diligent worker; hence upon this his eyes long rested as he racked his brains for means to reach it. There was nothing like a ladder in the tomb, and the coffin niches on the sides and rear—which Birch seldom took the trouble to use—afforded no ascent to the space above the door. Only the coffins themselves remained as potential stepping-stones, and as he considered these he speculated on the best mode of transporting them. Three coffin-heights, he reckoned, would permit him to reach the transom; but he could do better with four. The boxes were fairly even, and could be piled up like blocks; so he began to compute how he might most stably use the eight to rear a scalable platform four deep. As he planned, he could not but wish that the units of his contemplated staircase had been more securely made. Whether he had imagination enough to wish they were empty, is strongly to be doubted.

Finally he decided to lay a base of three parallel with the wall, to place upon this two layers of two each, and upon these a single box to serve as the platform. This arrangement could be ascended with a minimum of awkwardness, and would furnish the desired height. Better still, though, he would utilise only two boxes of the base to support the superstructure, leaving one free to be piled on top in case the actual feat of escape required an even greater altitude. And so the prisoner toiled in the twilight, heaving the unresponsive remnants of mortality with little ceremony as his miniature Tower of Babel rose course by course. Several of the coffins began to split under the stress of handling, and he planned to save the stoutly built casket of little Matthew Fenner for the top, in order that his feet might have as certain a surface as possible. In the semi-gloom he trusted mostly to touch to select the right one, and indeed came upon it almost by accident, since it tumbled into his hands as if through some odd volition after he had unwittingly placed it beside another on the third layer.

The tower at length finished, and his aching arms rested by a pause during which he sat on the bottom step of his grim device, Birch cautiously ascended with his tools and stood abreast of the narrow transom. The borders of the space were entirely of brick, and there seemed little doubt but that he could shortly chisel away enough to allow his body to pass. As his hammer blows began to fall, the horse outside whinnied in a tone which may have been encouraging and to others may have been mocking. In either case it would have been appropriate; for the unexpected tenacity of the easy-looking brickwork was surely a sardonic commentary on the vanity of mortal hopes, and the source of a task whose performance deserved every possible stimulus.

Dusk fell and found Birch still toiling. He worked largely by feeling now, since newly gathered clouds hid the moon; and though progress was still slow, he felt heartened at the extent of his encroachments on the top and bottom of the aperture. He could, he was sure, get out by midnight—though it is characteristic of him that this thought was untinged with eerie implications. Undisturbed by oppressive reflections on the time, the place, and the company beneath his feet, he philosophically chipped away the stony brickwork; cursing when a fragment hit him in the face, and laughing when one struck the increasingly excited horse that pawed near the cypress tree. In time the hole grew so large that he ventured to try his body in it now and then, shifting about so that the coffins beneath him rocked and creaked. He would

not, he found, have to pile another on his platform to make the proper height; for the hole was on exactly the right level to use as soon as its size might permit.

It must have been midnight at least when Birch decided he could get through the transom. Tired and perspiring despite many rests, he descended to the floor and sat a while on the bottom box to gather strength for the final wriggle and leap to the ground outside. The hungry horse was neighing repeatedly and almost uncannily, and he vaguely wished it would stop. He was curiously unelated over his impending escape, and almost dreaded the exertion, for his form had the indolent stoutness of early middle age. As he remounted the splitting coffins he felt his weight very poignantly; especially when, upon reaching the topmost one, he heard that aggravated crackle which bespeaks the wholesale rending of wood. He had, it seems, planned in vain when choosing the stoutest coffin for the platform; for no sooner was his full bulk again upon it than the rotting lid gave way, jouncing him two feet down on a surface which even he did not care to imagine. Maddened by the sound, or by the stench which billowed forth even to the open air, the waiting horse gave a scream that was too frantic for a neigh, and plunged madly off through the night, the wagon rattling crazily behind it.

Birch, in his ghastly situation, was now too low for an easy scramble out of the enlarged transom; but gathered his energies for a determined try. Clutching the edges of the aperture, he sought to pull himself up, when he noticed a queer retardation in the form of an apparent drag on both his ankles. In another moment he knew fear for the first time that night; for struggle as he would, he could not shake clear of the unknown grasp which held his feet in relentless captivity. Horrible pains, as of savage wounds, shot through his calves; and in his mind was a vortex of fright mixed with an unquenchable materialism that suggested splinters, loose nails, or some other attribute of a breaking wooden box. Perhaps he screamed. At any rate he kicked and squirmed frantically and automatically whilst his consciousness was almost eclipsed in a half-swoon.

Instinct guided him in his wriggle through the transom, and in the crawl which followed his jarring thud on the damp ground. He could not walk, it appeared, and the emerging moon must have witnessed a horrible sight as he dragged his bleeding ankles toward the cemetery lodge; his fingers clawing the black mould in brainless haste, and his body responding with that maddening slowness from which one suffers when chased by the phantoms of nightmare. There was evidently, however, no pursuer; for he was alone and alive when Armington, the lodge-keeper, answered his feeble clawing at the door.

Armington helped Birch to the outside of a spare bed and sent his little son Edwin for Dr. Davis. The afflicted man was fully conscious, but would say nothing of any consequence; merely muttering such things as "Oh, my ankles!", "Let go!", or "Shut in the tomb". Then the doctor came with his medicine-case and asked crisp questions, and removed the patient's outer clothing, shoes, and socks. The wounds—for both ankles were frightfully lacerated about the Achilles' tendons—seemed to puzzle the old physician greatly, and finally almost to frighten him. His questioning grew more than medically tense, and his hands shook as he dressed the mangled members; binding them as if he wished to get the wounds out of sight as quickly as possible.

For an impersonal doctor, Davis' ominous and awestruck cross-examination became very strange indeed as he sought to drain from the weakened undertaker every least detail of his horrible experience. He was oddly anxious to know if Birch were sure—absolutely sure—of the identity of that top coffin of the pile; how he had chosen it, how he had been certain of it

as the Fenner coffin in the dusk, and how he had distinguished it from the inferior duplicate coffin of vicious Asaph Sawyer. Would the firm Fenner casket have caved in so readily? Davis, an old-time village practitioner, had of course seen both at the respective funerals, as indeed he had attended both Fenner and Sawyer in their last illnesses. He had even wondered, at Sawyer's funeral, how the vindictive farmer had managed to lie straight in a box so closely akin to that of the diminutive Fenner.

After a full two hours Dr. Davis left, urging Birch to insist at all times that his wounds were caused entirely by loose nails and splintering wood. What else, he added, could ever in any case be proved or believed? But it would be well to say as little as could be said, and to let no other doctor treat the wounds. Birch heeded this advice all the rest of his life till he told me his story; and when I saw the scars—ancient and whitened as they then were—I agreed that he was wise in so doing. He always remained lame, for the great tendons had been severed; but I think the greatest lameness was in his soul. His thinking processes, once so phlegmatic and logical, had become ineffaceably scarred; and it was pitiful to note his response to certain chance allusions such as "Friday", "Tomb", "Coffin", and words of less obvious concatenation. His frightened horse had gone home, but his frightened wits never quite did that. He changed his business, but something always preyed upon him. It may have been just fear, and it may have been fear mixed with a queer belated sort of remorse for bygone crudities. His drinking, of course, only aggravated what it was meant to alleviate.

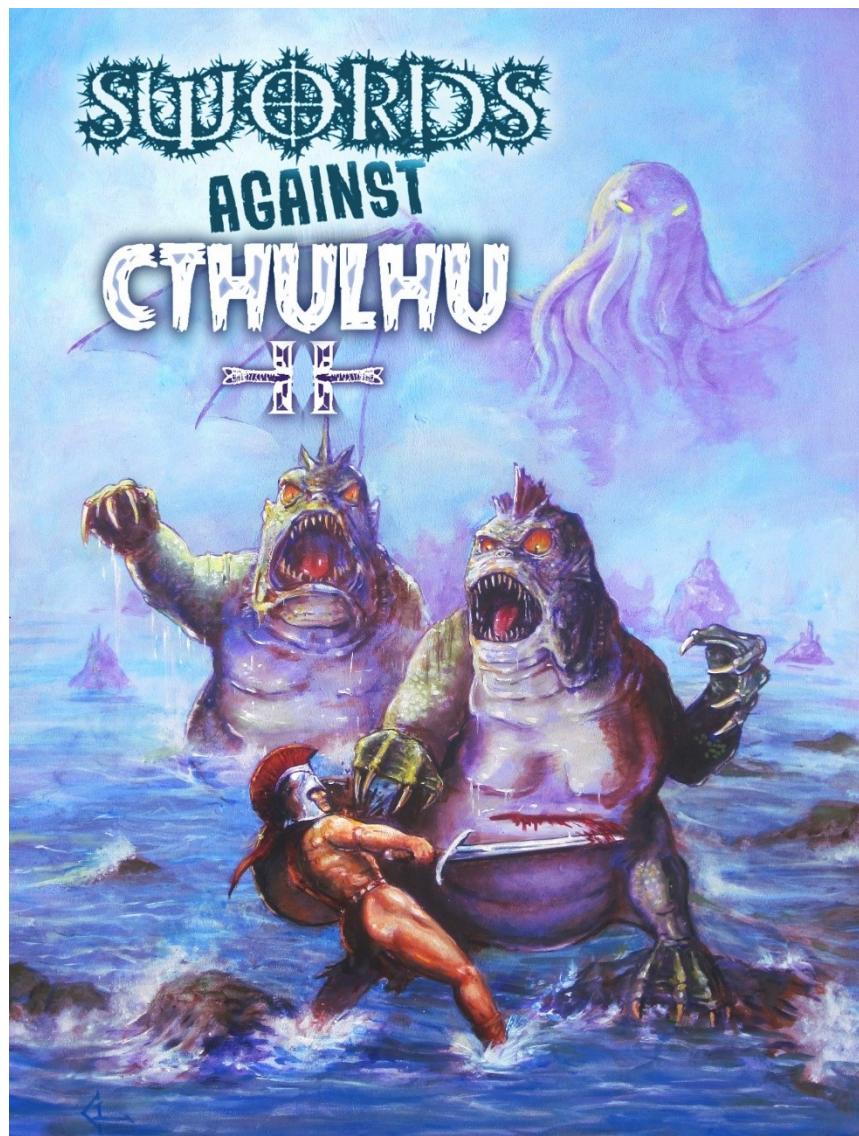
When Dr. Davis left Birch that night he had taken a lantern and gone to the old receiving tomb. The moon was shining on the scattered brick fragments and marred facade, and the latch of the great door yielded readily to a touch from the outside. Steeled by old ordeals in dissecting rooms, the doctor entered and looked about, stifling the nausea of mind and body that everything in sight and smell induced. He cried aloud once, and a little later gave a gasp that was more terrible than a cry. Then he fled back to the lodge and broke all the rules of his calling by rousing and shaking his patient, and hurling at him a succession of shuddering whispers that seared into the bewildered ears like the hissing of vitriol.

"It was Asaph's coffin, Birch, just as I thought! I knew his teeth, with the front ones missing on the upper jaw—never, for God's sake, show those wounds! The body was pretty badly gone, but if ever I saw vindictiveness on any face—or former face . . . You know what a fiend he was for revenge—how he ruined old Raymond thirty years after their boundary suit, and how he stepped on the puppy that snapped at him a year ago last August . . . He was the devil incarnate, Birch, and I believe his eye-for-an-eye fury could beat old Father Death himself. God, what a rage! I'd hate to have it aimed at me!"

"Why did you do it, Birch? He was a scoundrel, and I don't blame you for giving him a cast-aside coffin, but you always did go too damned far! Well enough to skimp on the thing some way, but you knew what a little man old Fenner was."

"I'll never get the picture out of my head as long as I live. You kicked hard, for Asaph's coffin was on the floor. His head was broken in, and everything was tumbled about. I've seen sights before, but there was one thing too much here. An eye for an eye! Great heavens, Birch, but you got what you deserved. The skull turned my stomach, but the other was worse—those ankles cut neatly off to fit Matt Fenner's cast-aside coffin!"

THE END



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ACROSS THE ZODIAC by Percy Greg

Chapter II—Outward Bound.

... For obvious reasons, those who possessed the secret of the Aergy [1] had never dreamed of applying it in the manner I proposed. It had seemed to them little more than a curious secret of nature, perhaps hardly so much, since the existence of a repulsive force in the atomic sphere had been long suspected and of late certainly ascertained, and its preponderance is held to be the characteristic of the gaseous as distinguished from the liquid or solid state of matter. Till lately, no means of generating or collecting this force in large quantity had been found. The progress of electrical science had solved this difficulty; and when the secret was communicated to me, it possessed a value which had never before belonged to it.

Ever since, in childhood, I learnt that the planets were worlds, a visit to one or more of the nearest of them had been my favourite day-dream. Treasuring every hint afforded by science or fancy that bore upon the subject, I felt confident that such a voyage would be one day achieved. Helped by one or two really ingenious romances on this theme, I had dreamed out my dream, realised every difficulty, ascertained every factor in the problem. I had satisfied myself that only one thing needful was as yet wholly beyond the reach and even the proximate hopes of science. Human invention could furnish as yet no motive power that could fulfil the main requirement of the problem—uniform or constantly increasing motion in vacuo—motion through a region affording no resisting medium. This must be a repulsive energy capable of acting through an utter void. Man, animals, birds, fishes move by repulsion applied at every moment. In air or water, paddles, oars, sails, fins, wings act by repulsion exerted on the fluid element in which they work. But in space there is no such resisting element on which repulsion can operate. I needed a repulsion which would act like gravitation through an indefinite distance and in a void—act upon a remote fulcrum, such as might be the Earth in a voyage to the Moon, or the Sun in a more distant journey. As soon, then, as the character of the apergic force was made known to me, its application to this purpose seized on my mind. Experiment had proved it possible, by the method described at the commencement of this record, to generate and collect it in amounts practically unlimited. The other hindrances to a voyage through space were trivial in comparison with that thus overcome; there were difficulties to be surmounted, not absent or deficient powers in nature to be discovered. The chief of these, of course, concerned the conveyance of air sufficient for the needs of the traveller during the period of his journey. The construction of an air-tight vessel was easy enough; but however large the body of air conveyed, even though its oxygen should not be exhausted, the carbonic acid given out by breathing would very soon so contaminate the whole that life would be impossible. To eliminate this element it would only be necessary to carry a certain quantity of lime-water, easily calculated, and by means of a fan or similar instrument to drive the whole of the air periodically through the vessel containing it. The lime in solution combining with the noxious gas would show by the turbid whiteness of the water the absorption of the carbonic acid and formation of carbonate of lime. But if the carbonic acid gas were merely to be removed, it is obvious that the oxygen of the air, which forms a part of that gas, would be constantly diminished and ultimately exhausted; and the effect of highly oxygenated air upon the circulation is notoriously too great to allow of any considerable increase at the outset in the proportion of this element. I might carry a fresh supply of oxygen, available at need, in some solid combination like chlorate of potash; but the electricity employed for the generation of the aergy might be also applied to the decomposition of carbonic acid and the restoration of its oxygen to the atmosphere.

But the vessel had to be steered as well as propelled; and in order to accomplish this it would be necessary to command the direction of the apergy at pleasure. My means of doing this depended on two of the best-established peculiarities of this strange force: its rectilinear direction and its conductibility. We found that it acts through air or in a vacuum in a single straight line, without deflection, and seemingly without diminution. Most solids, and especially metals, according to their electric condition, are more or less impervious to it—antaperigic. Its power of penetration diminishes under a very obscure law, but so rapidly that no conceivable strength of current would affect an object protected by an intervening sheet half an inch in thickness. On the other hand, it prefers to all other lines the axis of a conductive bar, such as may be formed of [undecipherable] in an antaperigic sheath. However such bar may be curved, bent, or divided, the current will fill and follow it, and pursue indefinitely, without divergence, diffusion, or loss, the direction in which it emerges. Therefore, by collecting the current from the generator in a vessel cased with antaperigic material, and leaving no other aperture, its entire volume might be sent into a conductor. By cutting across this conductor, and causing the further part to rotate upon the nearer, I could divert the current through any required angle. Thus I could turn the repulsion upon the resistant body (sun or planet), and so propel the vessel in any direction I pleased.

I had determined that my first attempt should be a visit to Mars. The Moon is a far less interesting body, since, on the hemisphere turned towards the Earth, the absence of an atmosphere and of water ensures the absence of any such life as is known to us—probably of any life that could be discerned by our senses—and would prevent landing; while nearly all the soundest astronomers agree in believing, on apparently sufficient grounds, that even the opposite hemisphere [of which small portions are from time to time rendered visible by the libration, though greatly foreshortened and consequently somewhat imperfectly seen] is equally devoid of the two primary necessities of animal and vegetable life. That Mars has seas, clouds, and an atmosphere was generally admitted, and I held it to be beyond question. Of Venus, owing to her extraordinary brilliancy, to the fact that when nearest to the Earth a very small portion of her lighted surface is visible to us, and above all to her dense cloud-envelope, very little was known; and though I cherished the intention to visit her even more earnestly than my resolve to reach the probably less attractive planet Mars, I determined to begin with that voyage of which the conditions and the probable result were most obvious and certain. I preferred, moreover, in the first instance, to employ the apergy as a propelling rather than as a resisting force. Now, after passing beyond the immediate sphere of the Earth's attraction, it is plain that in going towards Mars I should be departing from the Sun, relying upon the apergy to overcome his attraction; whereas in seeking to attain Venus I should be approaching the Sun, relying for my main motive power upon that tremendous attraction, and employing the apergy only to moderate the rate of movement and control its direction. The latter appeared to me the more delicate, difficult, and perhaps dangerous task of the two; and I resolved to defer it until after I had acquired some practical experience and dexterity in the control of my machinery.

It was expedient, of course, to make my vessel as light as possible, and, at the same time, as large as considerations of weight would admit. But it was of paramount importance to have walls of great thickness, in order to prevent the penetration of the outer cold of space, or rather the outward passage into that intense cold of the heat generated within the vessel itself, as well as to resist the tremendous outward pressure of the air inside. Partly for these reasons, and partly because its electric character makes it especially capable of being rendered at will pervious or impervious to the apergic current, I resolved to make the outer and inner walls of

an alloy of ..., while the space between should be filled up with a mass of concrete or cement, in its nature less penetrable to heat than any other substance which Nature has furnished or the wit of man constructed from her materials. The materials of this cement and their proportions were as follows. [2]

* * * * *

Briefly, having determined to take advantage of the approaching opposition of Mars in MDCCCXX ... [3], I had my vessel constructed with walls three feet thick, of which the outer six and the inner three inches were formed of the metalloid. In shape my Astronaut somewhat resembled the form of an antique Dutch East-Indiaman, being widest and longest in a plane equidistant from floor and ceiling, the sides and ends sloping outwards from the floor and again inwards towards the roof. The deck and keel, however, were absolutely flat, and each one hundred feet in length and fifty in breadth, the height of the vessel being about twenty feet. In the centre of the floor and in that of the roof respectively I placed a large lens of crystal, intended to act as a window in the first instance, the lower to admit the rays of the Sun, while through the upper I should discern the star towards which I was steering. The floor, being much heavier than the rest of the vessel, would naturally be turned downwards; that is, during the greater part of the voyage towards the Sun. I placed a similar lens in the centre of each of the four sides, with two plane windows of the same material, one in the upper, the other in the lower half of the wall, to enable me to discern any object in whatever direction. The crystal in question consisted of ..., which, as those who manufactured it for me are aware, admits of being cast with a perfection and equality of structure throughout unattainable with ordinary glass, and wrought to a certainty and accuracy of curvature which the most patient and laborious polishing can hardly give to the lenses even of moderate-sized telescopes, whether made of glass or metal, and is singularly impervious to heat. I had so calculated the curvature that several eye-pieces of different magnifying powers which I carried with me might be adapted equally to any of the window lenses, and throw a perfect image, magnified by 100, 1000, or 5000, upon mirrors properly placed.

I carpeted the floor with several alternate layers of cork and cloth. At one end I placed my couch, table, bookshelves, and other necessary furniture, with all the stores needed for my voyage, and with a further weight sufficient to preserve equilibrium. At the other I made a garden with soil three feet deep and five feet in width, divided into two parts so as to permit access to the windows. I filled each garden closely with shrubs and flowering plants of the greatest possible variety, partly to absorb animal waste, partly in the hope of naturalising them elsewhere. Covering both with wire netting extending from the roof to the floor, I filled the cages thus formed with a variety of birds. In the centre of the vessel was the machinery, occupying altogether a space of about thirty feet by twenty. The larger portion of this area was, of course, taken up by the generator, above which was the receptacle of the aergy. From this descended right through the floor a conducting bar in an antapergic sheath, so divided that without separating it from the upper portion the lower might revolve in any direction through an angle of twenty minutes ($20'$). This, of course, was intended to direct the stream of the repulsive force against the Sun. The angle might have been extended to thirty minutes, but that I deemed it inexpedient to rely upon a force, directed against the outer portions of the Sun's disc, believing that these are occupied by matter of density so small that it might afford no sufficient base, so to speak, for the repulsive action. It was obviously necessary also to repel or counteract the attraction of any body which might come near me during the voyage. Again, in getting free from the Earth's influence, I must be able to steer in any direction and at any angle to the surface. For this purpose I placed five smaller bars,

passing through the roof and four sides, connected, like the main conductor, with the receptacle or apergion, but so that they could revolve through a much larger angle, and could at any moment be detached and insulated. My steering apparatus consisted of a table in which were three large circles. The midmost and left hand of these were occupied by accurately polished plane mirrors. The central circle, or metacompass, was divided by three hundred and sixty fine lines, radiating from the centre to the circumference, marking as many different directions, each deviating by one degree of arc from the next. This mirror was to receive through the lens in the roof the image of the star towards which I was steering. While this remained stationary in the centre all was well. When it moved along any one of the lines, the vessel was obviously deviating from her course in the opposite direction; and, to recover the right course, the repellent force must be caused to drive her in the direction in which the image had moved. To accomplish this, a helm was attached to the lower division of the main conductor, by which the latter could be made to move at will in any direction within the limit of its rotation. Controlling this helm was, in the open or steering circle on the right hand, a small knob to be moved exactly parallel to the deviation of the star in the mirror of the metacompass. The left-hand circle, or discometer, was divided by nineteen hundred and twenty concentric circles, equidistant from each other. The outermost, about twice as far from the centre as from the external edge of the mirror, was exactly equal to the Sun's circumference when presenting the largest disc he ever shows to an observer on Earth. Each inner circle corresponded to a diameter reduced by one second. By means of a vernier or eye-piece, the diameter of the Sun could be read off the discometer, and from his diameter my distance could be accurately calculated. On the further side of the machinery was a chamber for the decomposition of the carbonic acid, through which the air was driven by a fan. This fan itself was worked by a horizontal wheel with two projecting squares of antaperic metal, against each of which, as it reached a certain point, a very small stream of repulsive force was directed from the apergion, keeping the wheel in constant and rapid motion. I had, of course, supplied myself with an ample store of compressed vegetables, preserved meats, milk, tea, coffee, &c., and a supply of water sufficient to last for double the period which the voyage was expected to occupy; also a well-furnished tool-chest (with wires, tubes, &c.). One of the lower windows was made just large enough to admit my person, and after entering I had to close it and fix it in its place firmly with cement, which, when I wished to quit the vessel, would have again to be removed.

Of course some months were occupied in the manufacture of the different portions of the vessel and her machinery, and sometime more in their combination; so that when, at the end of July, I was ready to start, the opposition was rapidly approaching. In the course of some fifty days the Earth, moving in her orbit at a rate of about eleven hundred miles [4] per minute, would overtake Mars; that is to say, would pass between him and the Sun. In starting from the Earth I should share this motion; I too should go eleven hundred miles a minute in the same direction; but as I should travel along an orbit constantly widening, the Earth would leave me behind. The apergy had to make up for this, as well as to carry me some forty millions of miles in a direction at right angles to the former—right outward towards the orbit of Mars. Again, I should share the motion of that particular spot of the Earth's surface from which I rose around her axis, a motion varying with the latitude, greatest at the equator, nothing at the pole. This would whirl me round and round the Earth at the rate of a thousand miles an hour; of this I must, of course, get rid as soon as possible. And when I should be rid of it, I meant to start at first right upward; that is, straight away from the Sun and in the plane of the ecliptic, which is not very different from that in which Mars also moves. Therefore I should begin my effective ascent from a point of the Earth as far as possible from the Sun; that is, on the midnight meridian.

For the same reason which led me to start so long before the date of the opposition, I resolved, having regard to the action of the Earth's rotation on her axis, to start some hours before midnight. Taking leave, then, of the two friends who had thus far assisted me, I entered the Astronaut on the 1st August, about 4.30 P.M. After sealing up the entrance-window, and ascertaining carefully that everything was in order—a task which occupied me about an hour—I set the generator to work; and when I had ascertained that the apergion was full, and that the force was supplied at the required rate, I directed the whole at first into the main conductor. After doing this I turned towards the lower window on the west—or, as it was then, the right-hand side—and was in time to catch sight of the trees on the hills, some half mile off and about two hundred feet above the level of my starting-point. I should have said that I had considerably compressed my atmosphere and increased the proportion of oxygen by about ten per cent., and also carried with me the means of reproducing the whole amount of the latter in case of need. Among my instruments was a pressure-gauge, so minutely divided that, with a movable vernier of the same power as the fixed ones employed to read the glass circles, I could discover the slightest escape of air in a very few seconds. The pressure-gauge, however, remained immovable. Going close to the window and looking out, I saw the Earth falling from me so fast that, within five minutes after my departure, objects like trees and even houses had become almost indistinguishable to the naked eye. I had half expected to hear the whistling of the air as the vessel rushed upward, but nothing of the kind was perceptible through her dense walls. It was strange to observe the rapid rise of the sun from the westward. Still more remarkable, on turning to the upper window, was the rapidly blackening aspect of the sky. Suddenly everything disappeared except a brilliant rainbow at some little distance—or perhaps I should rather have said a halo of more than ordinary rainbow brilliancy, since it occupied, not like the rainbows seen from below, something less than half, but nearly two-thirds of a circle. I was, of course, aware that I was passing through a cloud, and one of very unusual thickness. In a few seconds, however, I was looking down upon its upper surface, reflecting from a thousand broken masses of vapour at different levels, from cavities and hillocks of mist, the light of the sun; white beams mixed with innumerable rays of all colours in a confusion, of indescribable brilliancy. I presume that the total obscuration of everything outside the cloud during my passage through it was due to its extent and not to its density, since at that height it could not have been otherwise than exceedingly light and diffuse. Looking upward through the eastern window, I could now discern a number of brighter stars, and at nearly every moment fresh ones came into view on a constantly darkening background. Looking downward to the west, where alone the entire landscape lay in daylight, I presently discerned the outline of shore and sea extending over a semicircle whose radius much exceeded five hundred miles, implying that I was about thirty-five miles from the sea-level. Even at this height the extent of my survey was so great in comparison to my elevation, that a line drawn from the vessel to the horizon was, though very roughly, almost parallel to the surface; and the horizon therefore seemed to be not very far from my own level, while the point below me, of course, appeared at a vast distance. The appearance of the surface, therefore, was as if the horizon had been, say, some thirty miles higher than the centre of the semicircle bounding my view, and the area included in my prospect had the form of a saucer or shallow bowl. But since the diameter of the visible surface increases only as the square root of the height, this appearance became less and less perceptible as I rose higher. It had taken me twenty minutes to attain the elevation of thirty-five miles; but my speed was, of course, constantly increasing, very much as the speed of an object falling to the Earth from a great height increases; and before ten more minutes had elapsed, I found myself surrounded by a blackness nearly absolute, except in the direction of the Sun—which was still well above the sea—and immediately round the terrestrial horizon,

on which rested a ring of sunlit azure sky, broken here and there by clouds. In every other direction I seemed to be looking not merely upon a black or almost black sky, but into close surrounding darkness. Amid this darkness, however, were visible innumerable points of light, more or less brilliant—the stars—which no longer seemed to be spangled over the surface of a distant vault, but rather scattered immediately about me, nearer or farther to the instinctive apprehension of the eye as they were brighter or fainter. Scintillation there was none, except in the immediate vicinity of the eastern horizon, where I still saw them through a dense atmosphere. In short, before thirty minutes had elapsed since the start, I was satisfied that I had passed entirely out of the atmosphere, and had entered into the vacancy of space—if such a thing as vacant space there be.

At this point I had to cut off the greater part of the aergy and check my speed, for reasons that will be presently apparent. I had started in daylight in order that during the first hundred miles of my ascent I might have a clear view of the Earth's surface. Not only did I wish to enjoy the spectacle, but as I had to direct my course by terrestrial landmarks, it was necessary that I should be able to see these so as to determine the rate and direction of the Astronaut's motion, and discern the first symptoms of any possible danger. But obviously, since my course lay generally in the plane of the ecliptic, and for the present at least nearly in the line joining the centres of the Earth and Sun, it was desirable that my real journey into space should commence in the plane of the midnight meridian; that is, from above the part of the Earth's surface immediately opposite the Sun. I had to reach this line, and having reached it, to remain for some time above it. To do both, I must attain it, if possible, at the same moment at which I secured a westward impulse just sufficient to counterbalance the eastward impulse derived from the rotation of the Earth;—that is, in the latitude from which I started, a thousand miles an hour. I had calculated that while directing through the main bar a current of aergy sufficient to keep the Astronaut at a fixed elevation, I could easily spare for the eastward conductor sufficient force to create in the space of one hour the impulse required, but that in the course of that hour the gradually increasing aperic force would drive me 500 miles westward. Now in six hours the Earth's rotation would carry an object close to its surface through an angle of 90° ; that is, from the sunset to the midnight meridian. But the greater the elevation of the object the wider its orbit round the Earth's centre, and the longer each degree; so that moving eastward only a thousand miles an hour, I should constantly lag behind a point on the Earth's surface, and should not reach the midnight meridian till somewhat later. I had, moreover, to lose 500 miles of the eastward drift during the last hour in which I should be subject to it, through the action of the aperic force above-mentioned. Now, an elevation of 330 miles would give the Astronaut an orbit on which 90° would represent 6500 miles. In seven hours I should be carried along that orbit 7000 miles eastward by the impulse my Astronaut had received from the Earth, and driven back 500 miles by the aergy; so that at 1 A.M. by my chronometer I should be exactly in the plane of the midnight meridian, or 6500 miles east of my starting-point in space, provided that I put the eastward aperic current in action exactly at 12 P.M. by the chronometer. At 1 A.M. also I should have generated a westward impulse of 1000 miles an hour. This, once created, would continue to exist though the force that created it were cut off, and would exactly counterbalance the opposite rotation impulse derived from the Earth; so that thenceforward I should be entirely free from the influence of the latter, though still sharing that motion of the Earth through space at the rate of nearly nineteen miles per second, which would carry me towards the line joining at the moment of opposition her centre with that of Mars.

All went as I had calculated. I contrived to arrest the Astronaut's motion at the required elevation just about the moment of sunset on the region of the Earth immediately underneath.

At 12 P.M., or 24h by the chronometer, I directed a current of the requisite strength into the eastward conductor, which I had previously pointed to the Earth's surface, but a little short of the extreme terrestrial horizon, as I calculated it. At 1 A.M. I found myself, judging by the stars, exactly where I wished to be, and nearly stationary as regarded the Earth. I instantly arrested the eastward current, detaching that conductor from the apergion; and, directing the whole force of the current into the downward conductor, I had the pleasure of seeing that, after a very little adjustment of the helm, the stars remained stationary in the mirror of the metacompass, showing that I had escaped from the influence of the Earth's rotation. It was of course impossible to measure the distance traversed during the invisibility of the Earth, but I reckoned that I had made above 500 miles between 1h. and 2h. A.M., and that at 4h. I was not less than 4800 miles from the surface. With this inference the indication of my barycrite substantially agreed. The latter instrument consisted of a spring whose deflection by a given weight upon the equator had been very carefully tested. Gravity diminishing as the square of the distance from the centre, it was obvious that at about 8000 miles—or 4000 above the Earth's surface—this spring would be deflected only one quarter as much by a given weight as on Earth: at 16,000 miles from the surface, or 20,000 from the centre, one-twenty-fifth as much, and so on. I had graduated the scale accordingly, and it indicated at present a distance somewhat less than 9000 miles from the centre. Having adjusted the helm and set the alarm to wake me in six hours, I lay down upon my bed.

The anxiety and peril of my position had disturbed me very little whilst I was actively engaged either in steering and manipulating my machinery, or in looking upon the marvellous and novel spectacles presented to my eyes; but it now oppressed me in my sleep, and caused me frequently to wake from dreams of a hideous character. Two or three times, on such awaking, I went to examine the metacompass, and on one occasion found it necessary slightly to readjust the helm; the stars by which I steered having moved some second or two to the right of their proper position.

On rising, I completed the circuit which filled my vessel with brilliant light emitted from an electric lamp at the upper part of the stern, and reflected by the polished metallic walls. I then proceeded to get my breakfast, for which, as I had tasted nothing since some hours before the start, I had a hearty appetite. I had anticipated some trouble from the diminished action of gravity, doubting whether the boiling-point at this immense height above the Earth might not be affected; but I found that this depends upon the pressure of the atmosphere alone, and that this pressure was in nowise affected by the absence of gravity. My atmosphere being somewhat denser than that of the Earth, the boiling-point was not 100°, but 101° Cent. The temperature of the interior of the vessel, taken at a point equidistant from the stove and from the walls, was about 5° C.; unpleasantly cool, but still, with the help of a greatcoat, not inconveniently so. I found it absolutely impossible to measure by means of the thermometers I had placed outside the windows the cold of space; but that it falls far short of the extreme supposed by some writers, I confidently believe. It is, however, cold enough to freeze mercury, and to reduce every other substance employed as a test of atmospheric or laboratory temperatures to a solidity which admits of no further contraction. I had filled one outside thermometer with spirit, but this was broken before I looked at it; and in another, whose bulb unfortunately was blackened, and which was filled with carbonic acid gas, an apparent vacuum had been created. Was it that the gas had been frozen, and had sunk into the lower part of the bulb, where it would, of course, be invisible? When I had completed my meal and smoked the very small cigar which alone a prudent consideration for the state of the atmosphere would allow me, the chronometer showed 10 A.M. It was not surprising that by this time weight had become almost non-existent. My twelve stone had dwindled to the

weight of a small fowl, and hooking my little finger into the loop of a string hung from a peg fixed near the top of the stern wall, I found myself able thus to support my weight without any sense of fatigue for a quarter of an hour or more; in fact, I felt during that time absolutely no sense of muscular weariness. This state of things entailed only one inconvenience.

Nothing had any stability; so that the slightest push or jerk would upset everything that was not fixed. However, I had so far anticipated this that nothing of any material consequence was unfixed, and except that a touch with my spoon upset the egg-cup and egg on which I was about to breakfast, and that this, falling against a breakfast cup full of coffee, overturned that, I was not incommoded. I managed to save the greater part of the beverage, since, the atmospheric pressure being the same though the weight was so changed, lead, and still more china or liquid, fell in the Astronaut as slowly as feathers in the immediate vicinity of the Earth. Still it was a novel experience to find myself able to lean in any direction, and rest in almost any posture, with but the slightest support for the body's centre of gravity; and further to find on experiment that it was possible to remain for a couple of hours with my heels above my head, in the favourite position of a Yankee's lower limbs, without any perceptible congestion of blood or confusion of brain.

I was occupied all day with abstract calculations; and knowing that for some time I could see nothing of the Earth—her dark side being opposite me and wholly obscuring the Sun, while I was as yet far from having entered within the sphere where any novel celestial phenomena might be expected—I only gave an occasional glance at the discometer and metacompass, suppressing of course the electric glare within my vessel, till I awoke from a short siesta about 19h. (7 P.M.) The Earth at this time occupied on the sphere of view a space—defined at first only by the absence of stars—about thirty times greater than the disc of the Moon as seen through a tube; but, being dark, scarcely seemed larger to the eye than the full Moon when on the horizon. But a new method of defining its disc was presently afforded me. I was, in fact, when looking through the lower window, in the same position as regards the Earth as would be an inhabitant of the lunar hemisphere turned towards her, having no external atmosphere interposed between us, but being at about two-thirds of the lunar distance. And as, during an eclipse, the Lunarian would see round the Earth a halo created by the refraction of the Sun's rays in the terrestrial atmosphere—a halo bright enough on most occasions so to illuminate the Moon as to render her visible to us—so to my eyes the Earth was surrounded by a halo somewhat resembling the solar corona as seen in eclipses, if not nearly so brilliant, but, unlike the solar corona, coloured, with a preponderance of red so decided as fully to account for the peculiar hue of the eclipsed Moon. To paint this, unless means of painting light—the one great deficiency which is still the opprobrium of human art—were discovered, would task to the uttermost the powers of the ablest artist, and at best he could give but a very imperfect notion of it. To describe it so that its beauty, brilliancy, and wondrous nature shall be in the slightest degree appreciated by my readers would require a command of words such as no poet since Homer—nay, not Homer himself—possessed. What was strange, and can perhaps be rendered intelligible, was the variation, or, to use a phrase more suggestive and more natural, if not more accurate, the extreme mobility of the hues of this earthly corona. There were none of the efflorescences, if one may so term them, which are so generally visible at four cardinal points of its solar prototype. The outer portion of the band faded very rapidly into the darkness of space; but the edge, though absolutely undefined, was perfectly even. But on the generally rainbow-tinted ground suffused with red—which perhaps might best be described by calling it a rainbow seen on a background of brilliant crimson—there were here and there blotches of black or of lighter or darker grey, caused apparently by vast expanses of cloud, more or less dense. Round the edges of each of these were little irregular rainbow-coloured halos of their own interrupting and variegating the continuous bands of the

corona; while throughout all was discernible a perpetual variability, like the flashing or shooting of colour in the opal, the mother-of-pearl, or similarly tinted translucent substances when exposed to the irregular play of bright light—only that in this case the tints were incomparably more brilliant, the change more striking, if not more rapid. I could not say that at any particular moment any point or part of the surface presented this or that definite hue; and yet the general character of the rainbow, suffused with or backed by crimson, was constant and unmistakable. The light sent through the window was too dim and too imperfectly diffused within my vessel to be serviceable, but for some time I put out the electric lamp in order that its diffused light should not impair my view of this exquisite spectacle. As thrown, after several reflections, upon the mirror destined afterwards to measure the image of the solar disc, the apparition of the halo was of course much less bright, and its outer boundary ill-defined for accurate measurement. The inner edge, where the light was bounded by the black disc of the Earth, shaded off much more quickly from dark reddish purple into absolute blackness.

And now a surprise, the first I had encountered, awaited me. I registered the gravity as shown by the barycrite; and, extinguishing the electric lamp, measured repeatedly the semi-diameter of the Earth and of the halo around her upon the discometer, the inner edge of the latter affording the measurement of the black disc, which of itself, of course, cast no reflection. I saw at once that there was a signal difference in the two indications, and proceeded carefully to revise the earth-measurements. On the average of thirteen measures the halo was about 87", or nearly 1-1/2' in breadth, the disc, allowing for the twilight round its edge or limb, about 2° 50'. If the refracting atmosphere were some 65 miles in depth, these proportions were correct. Relighting the lamp, I worked out severally on paper the results indicated by the two instruments. The discometer gave a distance, roughly speaking, of 40 terrestrial radii, or 160,000 miles. The barycrite should have shown a gravity, due to the Earth's attraction, not 40 but 1600 times less than that prevailing on the Earth's surface; or, to put it in a less accurate form, a weight of 100 lbs. should have weighed an ounce. It did weigh two ounces, the gravity being not one 1600th but one 800th of terrestrial gravity, or just double what, I expected. I puzzled myself over this matter longer, probably, than the intelligent reader will do: the explanation being obvious, like that of many puzzles that bewilder our minds intensely, only to humiliate us proportionately when the solution is found—a solution as simple as that of Columbus's egg-riddle. At length, finding that the lunar angle—the apparent position of the Moon—confirmed the reading of the discometer, giving the same apogeic distance or elevation, I supposed that the barycrite must be out of order or subject to some unsuspected law of which future observations might afford evidence and explanation, and turned to other subjects of interest.

Looking through the upper window on the left, I was struck by the rapid enlargement of a star which, when I first noticed it, might be of the third magnitude, but which in less than a minute attained the first, and in a minute more was as large as the planet Jupiter when seen with a magnifying power of one hundred diameters.

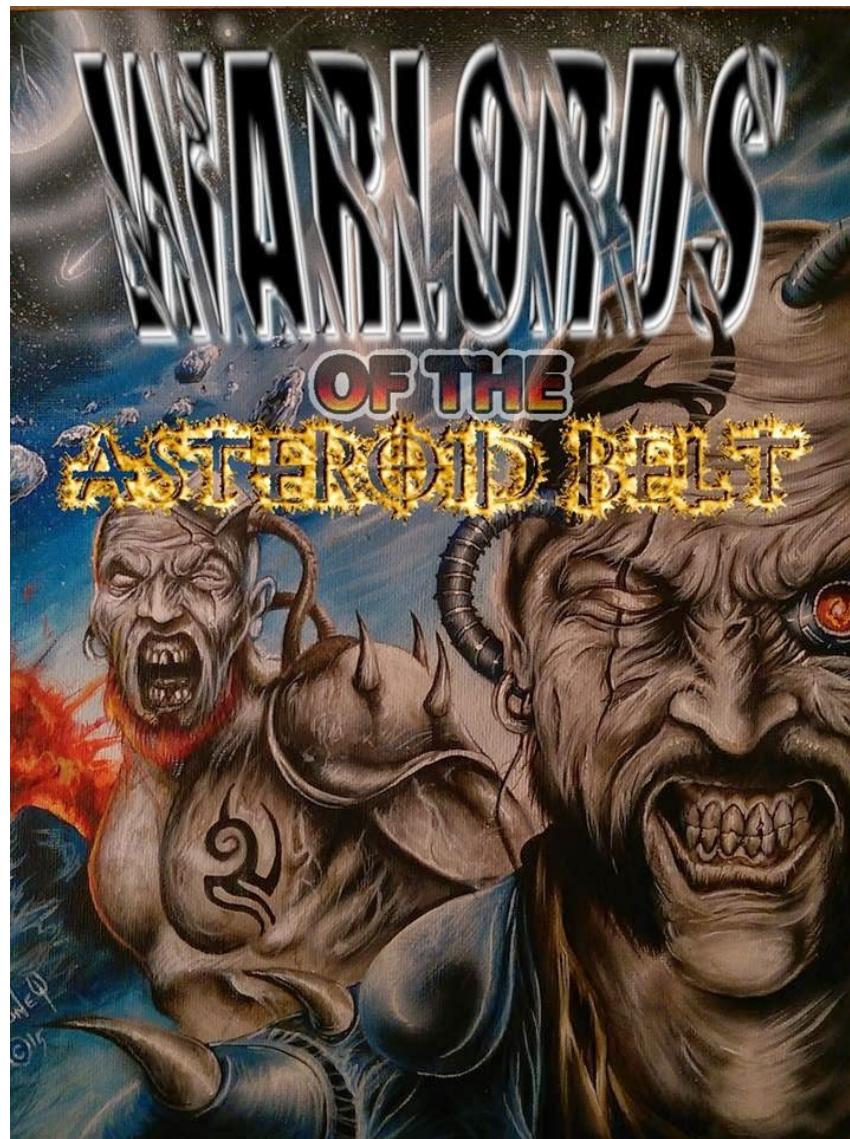
Its disc, however, had no continuous outline; and as it approached I perceived that it was an irregular mass of whose size I could form not even a conjectural estimate, since its distance must be absolutely uncertain. Its brilliancy grew fainter in proportion to the enlargement as it approached, proving that its light was reflected; and as it passed me, apparently in the direction of the earth, I had a sufficiently distinct view of it to know that it was a mainly metallic mass, certainly of some size, perhaps four, perhaps twenty feet in diameter, and apparently composed chiefly of iron; showing a more or less blistered surface, but with

angles sharper and faces more regularly defined than most of those which have been found upon the earth's surface—as if the shape of the latter might be due in part to the conflagration they undergo in passing at such tremendous speed through the atmosphere, or, in an opposite sense, to the fractures caused by the shock of their falling. Though I made no attempt to count the innumerable stars in the midst of which I appeared to float, I was convinced that their number was infinitely greater than that visible to the naked eye on the brightest night. I remembered how greatly the inexperienced eye exaggerates the number of stars visible from the Earth, since poets, and even olden observers, liken their number to that of the sands on the seashore; whereas the patient work of map and catalogue makers has shown that there are but a few thousands visible in the whole heavens to the keenest unaided sight. I suppose that I saw a hundred times that number. In one word, the sphere of darkness in which I floated seemed to be filled with points of light, while the absolute blackness that surrounded them, the absence of the slightest radiation, or illumination of space at large, was strange beyond expression to an eye accustomed to that diffusion of light which is produced by the atmosphere. I may mention here that the recognition of the constellations was at first exceedingly difficult. On Earth we see so few stars in any given portion of the heavens, that one recognises without an effort the figure marked out by a small number of the brightest amongst them; while in my position the multitude was so great that only patient and repeated effort enabled me to separate from the rest those peculiarly brilliant luminaries by which we are accustomed to define such constellations as Orion or the Bear, to say nothing of those minor or more arbitrarily drawn figures which contain few stars of the second magnitude. The eye had no instinctive sense of distance; any star might have been within a stone's throw. I need hardly observe that, while on one hand the motion of the vessel was absolutely imperceptible, there was, on the other, no change of position among the stars which could enable me to verify the fact that I was moving, much less suggest it to the senses. The direction of every recognisable star was the same as on Earth, as it appears the same from the two extremities of the Earth's orbit, 19 millions of miles apart. Looking from any one window, I could see no greater space of the heavens than in looking through a similar aperture on Earth. What was novel and interesting in my stellar prospect was, not merely that I could see those stars north and south which are never visible from the same point on Earth, except in the immediate neighbourhood of the Equator; but that, save on the small space concealed by the Earth's disc, I could, by moving from window to window, survey the entire heavens, looking at one minute upon the stars surrounding the vernal, and at another, by changing my position, upon those in the neighbourhood of the autumnal equinox. By little more than a turn of my head I could see in one direction Polaris (*alpha Ursæ Minoris*) with the Great Bear, and in another the Southern Cross, the Ship, and the Centaur.

About 23h. 30m., near the close of the first day, I again inspected the barycrite. It showed 1/1100 of terrestrial gravity, an incredibly small change from the 1/800 recorded at 19h., since it implied a progress proportionate only to the square root of the difference. The observation indicated, if the instrument could be trusted, an advance of only 18,000 miles. It was impossible that the Astronaut had not by this time attained a very much greater speed than 4000 miles an hour, and a greater distance from the Earth than 33 terrestrial radii, or 132,000 miles. Moreover, the barycrite itself had given at 19h. a distance of 28-1/2 radii, and a speed far greater than that which upon its showing had since been maintained. Extinguishing the lamp, I found that the Earth's diameter on the discometer measured $2^{\circ} 3' 52''$ (?). This represented a gain of some 90,000 miles; much more approximate to that which, judging by calculation, I ought to have accomplished during the last four hours and a half, if my speed approached to that I had estimated. I inspected the cratometer, which indicated a force as great as that with which I had started, —a force which should by this time have given

me a speed of at least 22,000 miles an hour. At last the solution of the problem flashed upon me, suggested by the very extravagance of the contradictions. Not only did the barycrite contradict the discometer and the reckoning but it contradicted itself; since it was impossible that under one continuous impulsation I should have traversed 28-1/2 radii of the Earth in the first eighteen hours and no more than 4-1/2 in the next four and a half hours. In truth, the barycrite was effected by two separate attractions,—that of the Earth and that of the Sun, as yet operating almost exactly in the same direction. At first the attraction of the former was so great that that of the Sun was no more perceived than upon the Earth's surface. But as I rose, and the Earth's attraction diminished in proportion to the square of the distance from her centre—which was doubled at 8000 miles, quadrupled at 16,000, and so on—the Sun's attraction, which was not perceptibly affected by differences so small in proportion to his vast distance of 95,000,000 miles, became a more and more important element in the total gravity. If, as I calculated, I had by 19h. attained a distance from the earth of 160,000 miles, the attractions of Earth and Sun were by that time pretty nearly equal; and hence the phenomenon which had so puzzled me, that the gravitation, as indicated by the barycrite, was exactly double that which, bearing in mind the Earth's attraction alone, I had calculated. From this point forward the Sun's attraction was the factor which mainly caused such weight as still existed; a change of position which, doubling my distance from the Earth, reduced her influence to one-fourth, not perceptibly affecting that of a body four hundred times more remote. A short calculation showed that, this fact borne in mind, the indication of the barycrite substantially agreed with that of the discometer, and that I was in fact very nearly where I supposed, that is, a little farther than the Moon's farthest distance from the Earth. It did not follow that I had crossed the orbit of the Moon; and if I had, she was at that time too far off to exercise a serious influence on my course. I adjusted the helm and betook myself to rest, the second day of my journey having already commenced.

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THE WAR OF THE WORLDS by HG Wells

Book One: The Coming of The Martians

Chapter Seven: How I Reached Home

For my own part, I remember nothing of my flight except the stress of blundering against trees and stumbling through the heather. All about me gathered the invisible terrors of the Martians; that pitiless sword of heat seemed whirling to and fro, flourishing overhead before it descended and smote me out of life. I came into the road between the crossroads and Horsell, and ran along this to the crossroads.

At last I could go no further; I was exhausted with the violence of my emotion and of my flight, and I staggered and fell by the wayside. That was near the bridge that crosses the canal by the gasworks. I fell and lay still.

I must have remained there some time.

I sat up, strangely perplexed. For a moment, perhaps, I could not clearly understand how I came there. My terror had fallen from me like a garment. My hat had gone, and my collar had burst away from its fastener. A few minutes before, there had only been three real things before me--the immensity of the night and space and nature, my own feebleness and anguish, and the near approach of death. Now it was as if something turned over, and the point of view altered abruptly. There was no sensible transition from one state of mind to the other. I was immediately the self of every day again--a decent, ordinary citizen. The silent common, the impulse of my flight, the starting flames, were as if they had been in a dream. I asked myself had these latter things indeed happened? I could not credit it.

I rose and walked unsteadily up the steep incline of the bridge. My mind was blank wonder. My muscles and nerves seemed drained of their strength. I dare say I staggered drunkenly. A head rose over the arch, and the figure of a workman carrying a basket appeared. Beside him ran a little boy. He passed me, wishing me good night. I was minded to speak to him, but did not. I answered his greeting with a meaningless mumble and went on over the bridge.

Over the Maybury arch a train, a billowing tumult of white, firelit smoke, and a long caterpillar of lighted windows, went flying south--clatter, clatter, clap, rap, and it had gone. A dim group of people talked in the gate of one of the houses in the pretty little row of gables that was called Oriental Terrace. It was all so real and so familiar. And that behind me! It was frantic, fantastic! Such things, I told myself, could not be.

Perhaps I am a man of exceptional moods. I do not know how far my experience is common. At times I suffer from the strangest sense of detachment from myself and the world about me; I seem to watch it all from the outside, from somewhere inconceivably remote, out of time, out of space, out of the stress and tragedy of it all. This feeling was very strong upon me that night. Here was another side to my dream.

But the trouble was the blank incongruity of this serenity and the swift death flying yonder, not two miles away. There was a noise of business from the gasworks, and the electric lamps were all alright. I stopped at the group of people.

“What news from the common?” said I.

There were two men and a woman at the gate.

“Eh?” said one of the men, turning.

“What news from the common?” I said.

“Ain’t yer just been there?” asked the men.

“People seem fair silly about the common,” said the woman over the gate. “What’s it all abart?”

“Haven’t you heard of the men from Mars?” said I; “the creatures from Mars?”

“Quite enough,” said the woman over the gate. “Thenks”; and all three of them laughed.

I felt foolish and angry. I tried and found I could not tell them what I had seen. They laughed again at my broken sentences.

“You’ll hear more yet,” I said, and went on to my home.

I startled my wife at the doorway, so haggard was I. I went into the dining room, sat down, drank some wine, and so soon as I could collect myself sufficiently I told her the things I had seen. The dinner, which was a cold one, had already been served, and remained neglected on the table while I told my story.

“There is one thing,” I said, to allay the fears I had aroused; “they are the most sluggish things I ever saw crawl. They may keep the pit and kill people who come near them, but they cannot get out of it... But the horror of them!”

“Don’t, dear!” said my wife, knitting her brows and putting her hand on mine.

“Poor Ogilvy!” I said. “To think he may be lying dead there!”

My wife at least did not find my experience incredible. When I saw how deadly white her face was, I ceased abruptly.

“They may come here,” she said again and again.

I pressed her to take wine, and tried to reassure her.

“They can scarcely move,” I said.

I began to comfort her and myself by repeating all that Ogilvy had told me of the impossibility of the Martians establishing themselves on the earth. In particular I laid stress on the gravitational difficulty. On the surface of the earth the force of gravity is three times what it is on the surface of Mars. A Martian, therefore, would weigh three times more than on Mars, albeit his muscular strength would be the same. His own body would be a cope of lead to him. That, indeed, was the general opinion. Both The Times and the Daily Telegraph, for

instance, insisted on it the next morning, and both overlooked, just as I did, two obvious modifying influences.

The atmosphere of the earth, we now know, contains far more oxygen or far less argon (whichever way one likes to put it) than does Mars. The invigorating influences of this excess of oxygen upon the Martians indisputably did much to counterbalance the increased weight of their bodies. And, in the second place, we all overlooked the fact that such mechanical intelligence as the Martian possessed was quite able to dispense with muscular exertion at a pinch.

But I did not consider these points at the time, and so my reasoning was dead against the chances of the invaders. With wine and food, the confidence of my own table, and the necessity of reassuring my wife, I grew by insensible degrees courageous and secure.

“They have done a foolish thing,” said I, fingering my wineglass. “They are dangerous because, no doubt, they are mad with terror. Perhaps they expected to find no living things--certainly no intelligent living things.”

“A shell in the pit,” said I, “if the worst comes to the worst will kill them all.”

The intense excitement of the events had no doubt left my perceptive powers in a state of erethism. I remember that dinner table with extraordinary vividness even now. My dear wife’s sweet anxious face peering at me from under the pink lamp shade, the white cloth with its silver and glass table furniture--for in those days even philosophical writers had many little luxuries--the crimson-purple wine in my glass, are photographically distinct. At the end of it I sat, tempering nuts with a cigarette, regretting Ogilvy’s rashness, and denouncing the short-sighted timidity of the Martians.

So some respectable dodo in the Mauritius might have lorded it in his nest, and discussed the arrival of that shipful of pitiless sailors in want of animal food. “We will peck them to death tomorrow, my dear.”

I did not know it, but that was the last civilised dinner I was to eat for very many strange and terrible days.

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