

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

# **Schlock!**

**WEBZINE**

VOL. 15, ISSUE 13  
29ND SEPTEMBER 2019

**WHY IT WILL  
ALWAYS BE  
7.10 PM**

BY DAVE  
LUDFORD  
IT MUST BE  
SIGNIFICANT IN  
SOME WAY...

**THE KING'S  
HEAD**

BY MATTHEW  
ROY DAVEY  
SPENDING A  
PENNY...

**SEX LINE  
BY CHRISTOPHER T  
DABROWSKI**

**MISS THING  
BY CARLTON  
HERZOG**

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

SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

Edited by  
Gavin Chappell

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

Schlock! Webzine

*Copyright © 2019 by Vincent Davis, Matthew Roy Davey, Rob Bliss, Christopher T  
Dabrowski, Dave Ludford, Carlton Herzog, Rex Mundy, Edgar Wallace, Charles B Stilson*

## SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

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

Vol. 15, Issue 13  
29<sup>nd</sup> September 2019

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

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

Schlock! Webzine is always willing to consider new science fiction, fantasy and horror short stories, serials, graphic novels and comic strips, reviews and art. Submit fiction, articles, art, or links to your own site to [editor@schlock.co.uk](mailto:editor@schlock.co.uk). We no longer review published and self-published novels directly, although we are willing to accept reviews from other writers. Any other enquiries, including requests to advertise in our quarterly printed magazine, also to [editor@schlock.co.uk](mailto:editor@schlock.co.uk)

The stories, articles and illustrations contained in this webzine are copyright © to the respective authors and illustrators, unless in the public domain.  
Schlock! Webzine and its editor accept no liability for views expressed or statements made by contributors to the magazine.

*This Edition*

This week's cover illustration is *People Tube* by [Rennett Stowe](#). Graphic design © by [Gavin Chappell](#), logo design © by C Priest Brumley.

EDITORIAL

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

WHY IT WILL ALWAYS BE 7.10 PM by Dave Ludford—*It must be significant in some way...* HORROR

THE CASTLE OUROBOROS Part Twenty Four by Rob Bliss—*Teutonic sword...* GOTHIC HORROR

THE KING'S HEAD by Matthew Roy Davey—*Spending a penny...* TIME TRAVEL

SEX LINE by Christopher T Dabrowski—*Cosmic union...* HORROR

MISS THING by Carlton Herzog—*Kid gloves...* HORROR

SOLDIERS OF MISFORTUNE Parts Five and Six by Rex Mundy—*Amazons...* LOST RACE FANTASY

PLANETOID 127 Chapter Eight by Edgar Wallace—*The Story of Neo...* SCIENCE FICTION CLASSIC

POLARIS OF THE SNOWS Chapter Five by Charles B Stilson—*Battle on the Floe...* SCIENCE FANTASY CLASSIC

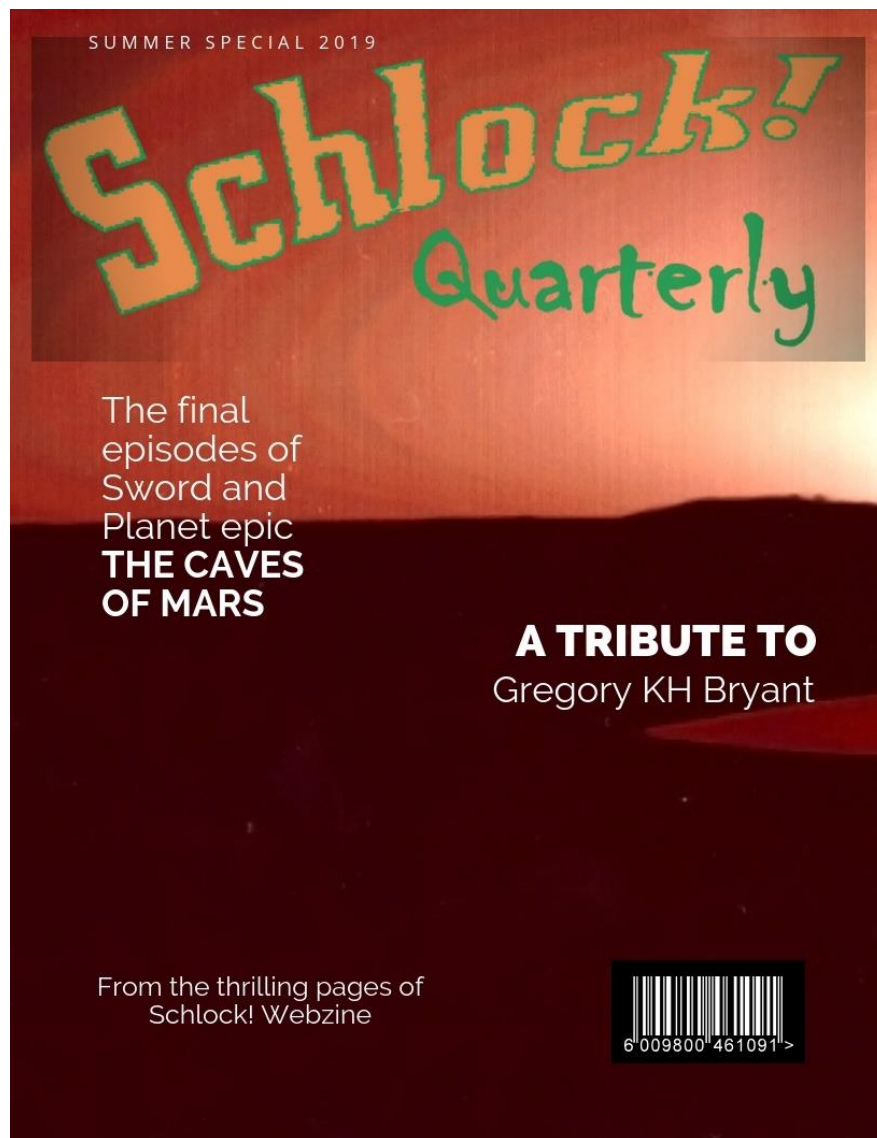
## EDITORIAL

This week, a man learns that he is lost in time. Kasimir Kohl tries to escape the burning castle. John experiences a time slip. A blind date opens a woman's eyes to the truth. And a substitute teacher learns something new about one of his students.

The lost city is attacked by desert nomads. Lensman reads the story of Neo. And Polaris battles a bear on the ice.

—Gavin Chappell

Now available from Rogue Planet Press: [Schlock Quarterly Volume 3, Issue 9](#)



[Return to Contents](#)



IT CAME FROM INSIDE THE INKWELL!

## IT CAME FROM INSIDE THE INKWELL!

By Vincent Davis



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

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

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

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

[Return to Contents](#)

## WHY IT WILL ALWAYS BE 7.10 PM by Dave Ludford

You finish your evening meal and look up at the dining room clock: 7.10pm.

You put on a CD of Mozart's 'The Magic Flute' and settle down with a bottle of wine. When the CD finishes you look at the living room clock: 7.10pm. Puzzled, you walk back into the dining room and the clock still states that it is 7.10pm.

You check the time display of your cell phone: 7.10pm. You call your sister who lives just three blocks away. Although baffled by your question, she confirms that it is 7.10pm.

You wait for an hour to elapse (albeit that you have to guesstimate this) and call your sister back. Somewhat exasperatedly she confirms that it is 7.10pm and what the hell is the matter with you, stop calling to ask the fucking time for heaven's sake, I've got better things to do even if you haven't. Asshole.

You go to bed and sleep for eight hours straight. No need for a clock to measure this; your own body clock is tuned to sleeping for exactly that length of time. On waking, despite the fact that it is quite clearly dawn, you check your bedside digital clock display and it informs you that it is 7.10pm.

Having showered and changed you walk to Abe's corner store and the clock behind the counter reads...yeah, fuck, no kidding. You ask Abe for confirmation and he gives you the same look as he would someone who has just escaped from a lunatic asylum. You buy coffee and a doughnut and go sit in the park.

7.10pm: it must be significant in some way...

Then it hits you like a punch from a world champion boxer.

Grace died at precisely 7.10pm exactly one year ago. That is when time seemed to stand still and your world fell apart. How could you have forgotten that?

Rising, you walk back to your apartment and the first thing you notice is the paint peeling from the front door; then your eyes flick to the weeds growing between the slabs of the short path leading to it. Then the grimy front window.

Letting yourself in, you further notice the dusty hallway carpet and the scattering of unopened mail. The cobwebs hanging from the ceiling. The peeling wallpaper. The general air of decay and abandonment. Into the kitchen and a mass of flies buzz around a sink full of unwashed plates and dishes. The stench makes you nauseous. You open a window and notice as you do so that your rear lawn, once your pride and joy, is overgrown and choked with weeds.

Back inside your living room you walk to the drinks cabinet, take out a bottle of whisky, and having unscrewed the cap, raise it in the gesture of a toast.

"Here's to you, Grace."

Then put it to your lips and take a long, hard swig, until you almost choke.



Then you throw the bottle at the wall opposite where it smashes and a flood of pale brown liquid gushes to the filthy carpet.

You lean against the wall, close your eyes. Resolve to start cleaning up this shithole; Grace wouldn't want you to live like this.

No rush, though. You've got plenty of time.

THE END

[Return to Contents](#)

## THE CASTLE OUROBOROS by Rob Bliss

### Chapter 24

I rushed for the door that lead into the antechamber where the cabal awaited, where the stairs of escape rose into the castle and beyond to safety. But the door was secure. I wrenched at the latch as muted voices called and fists pounded from the other side. The smell of smoke reached my nostrils.

I tried my keys, but none worked. Spinning on my heel, I was about to command Gustav to provide either a key to the lock or an explanation as to why it was secured. Instead, I met my faithful manservant holding in his hand the sword I had dropped in my panicked rush. The tip was raised in line with my eyes.

“What do you think you are doing, Gustav? Unlock this door at once—I command you!”

“My sincere apologies, m’lord,” he said, neither the sword in his hand nor his sunken eye sockets wavering from me, their target. “I have altered the locking mechanism so that once the door is closed it could not be opened. Even by me, sir. The members of your Brotherhood—to which I could never be a part, nor would I wish to be—will find that the door at the top of the stair, before the painting, is similarly bolted and impossible to open. I am of your father’s generation, sir, not yours. I am his servant, and thus, a servant to the family heritage he represents. I am obliged to do all in my power to protect that heritage. Even if that means—I do beg your pardon, sir—doing away with a corrupt member of that family. A member who will, and has somewhat successfully, spent much of his life trying to destroy the family’s lineage. You, m’lord.”

I circled him around the racks, but he kept his sword point ever on my stare. Surely he heard the shuffling of my feet on stone.

“Don’t be a fool, Gustav. If the fire consumes me, it consumes you as well.”

“I will happily die with this ancient castle, sir. I know its dark corners as well as I know the blackness of my eyes. It is my only home.”

I wrenched a mace from its mount on the wall, spun it in a quick circle with a snap of my wrist, hoping to smash the sword from the servant’s two handed grip.

He parried left, deftly flicked the sword point in an arc, and slashed my forearm. The mace dropped and clattered on the floor. The sword stayed aimed at my throat as I held in the blood flow with my free hand.

“I can make a place for you in the New Age,” I pleaded. “You will continue to serve my family—”

“It is not your family, sir, but your father’s, as I described. Your sister is the only member remaining who can best continue the regal heritage that once proudly strode these castle walls. Your father knew it, thus the inheritance went to her. And her twin sister. At least now, the ghost will be able to rest in peace.”

“You knew of her?” I queried in shock. That apparition—that hellish demon—had haunted my dreams and my waking hours. I passed the poltergeist off as an atmospheric anomaly, or too much port before bed, to not give it the attention it sought. I thought only Cybele and I knew of its presence. But it seems as though the demon girl had haunted all who came within these walls, any whom she could sway to her path to destroy me. Even my old friend Friedrich had mentioned her at his arrival. The ghost must have seen his, and Gustav’s, potential to be consorts.

“She has made me feel at peace,” Gustav said. “Coming to me in dreams to inform me of your true nature. I have seen impossible wars soon to come, in part due to your actions. I feared to believe the mirages were omens of fact. But now I know the true nature of you and your cabal. You have not filled these castle walls with the enemy dead of this family, but with your personal enemies. Good men who died by your hand trying to resist the hell you are attempting to bring on this earth. But no more, m’lord.”

From some shadowed corner sprung Herr Hitler, brandishing a rapier. He attempted to run it through Gustav’s kidneys, but the servant was too agile. The Teutonic sword snapped the rapier in two, and the boy dropped to the floor with a deep gash in his thigh, spilling his holy blood. He screamed like a banshee, the cry echoing against the stone walls.

Gustav backed himself toward the racks, sword in a single hand but always directed at me. From his waistcoat pocket he drew a ring of keys.

Screaming voices and hammering fists continued from the locked door as smoke emanated from beneath it. I watched Gustav remove the gag from Friedrich and begin to open the shackles. His pitted eye sockets never left my piercing stare, his hand tense on the handle of the sword.

Friedrich was free, rubbing his wrists, cursing my name. He took the keys from Gustav, ungagged Cybele and unlocked her bonds. The three soon faced me, but I only felt a threat from my eyeless servant.

He backed into a corner of the room and reached forth a hand to push against a stone, which moved inward. This triggered a section of wall to grind across the floor as it too sank inward, revealing a dark doorway that was a mystery to me. My servant clearly knew more than his master.

“Quickly, sir, mademoiselle, through here is safe passage from the castle,” Gustav commanded. “I’ve unlocked a door at the end of the passage. It leads to an exterior turret, and from there you can manage your way to the stables.”

My sister rushed to his side, pleaded with him. “You must come, Gustav. Do not stay here to be consumed by the flames above.”

“No, miss, my place is here. It has been an honour to serve you. Keep the family lineage strong, my dear.”

“I will,” she whispered as a tear fell from her eye. “Thank you for all you have done for our family, for my father and mother and my dear sister. And for the great sacrifice of yourself ... you are a king, sir.”

If eyeless hollows could have wept, Gustav would have poured tears from his wrinkled skin and ancient skull.

Cybele kissed his cheek before she and Friedrich vanished through the stone wall. Gustav turned his head in the direction of their passage. I used the opportunity to my advantage and rushed toward the doorway myself, ready to slam the feeble body of the old man into the wall, to crush his bones into dust, to kill one last time in order to make good my escape.

But he was quickness itself. His ears too attuned to all sound, I assumed, even the slightest change in air pressure.

The sword went into my midsection and through my back. I gazed up into the hollow sockets of old flesh as the incredible strength of Gustav's arm held me against himself, holding steady the sword that pierced my life. Then he released me to slip off the steel and sink to the stone floor.

My breath heaved as blood poured from my stomach, rose to spill from my lips. Gustav looked down at me, but then stepped over my prone body, tapped the tip of the sword like a cane as he sat on a wooden garrotte torture chair, like an ancient king awaiting his death at the arrival of the modern world.

Smoke hovered around his head. He inhaled deeply, let his head sink back, let the sword slip to the floor and clang on the stone.

In a final urge of desperation, I crawled for the gap in the wall, hoping in my delusion to still escape the castle, not wanting to die in such a pedestrian manner. But my weakened body was slammed to the floor by the footsteps of Herr Hitler. He climbed over me to slip into the darkness of the hidden doorway—to his safety and the continuation of his divine reign.

CONCLUDES NEXT WEEK



Available from Necro Publications.

[Return to Contents](#)



## THE KING'S HEAD by Matthew Roy Davey

The shock of the impact rang in John's skull. When he looked up everything had changed; sounds, light, even the smiling man before him who held out his hand, palm up and glittering.

They were on their way to see Tony, Cheryl and the kids. Anne had suggested taking the train rather than driving. John liked trains, they reminded him of childhood, the excitement of travel, the sounds and the smells, though the station now was unrecognisable. Everything was plastic and metal, the shop fronts and seating harshly reflecting the cold white light. Even the air had a metallic diesel bite. It was such a shame.

"I need the loo," he said.

"You go and I'll get the tickets," said Anne.

John gazed around the concourse, looking for the toilet. There were turnstiles but he was too old to vault. He hated paying for the privilege to pee. In the old days he'd have gone to the pub, but that had been turned into a coffee shop and one had to walk past the counter to get to the loo. It made him feel uncomfortable, the disapproving eyes he felt sure were upon him. There was nothing for it, he'd have to spend a penny.

He'd just shaken the coins into his palm, searching for a twenty pence piece, when he was jolted from behind, his handful of coins tinkling over the grey scuffed floor.

"Sorry mate!" called a young man as he raced for the platform.

John stared at the constellation of coins, knowing his back would ache when he straightened. As he bent over it happened: the stranger bending simultaneously to help, their heads meeting with a crack.

"Apologies," smiled the man, removing his trilby and rubbing his head. "So clumsy." The light seemed softer, the air somehow different, no longer metal, more like a hearth, a fire. The man was wearing a grey serge suit. He handed John a large copper coin. "Yours, I believe". In the man's other hand a cigarette smouldered.

"Thank you," John muttered, rubbing his own swimming head.

John turned, taking in his surroundings. Where there had been plastic now there was wood; the shop fronts, the benches. Where the light had flashed it now glowed. Where there had been a coffee shop there was a pub. The old pub. A voice, clipped and precise, echoed through the station, announcing the departure of a train to Kingsbridge. Hadn't that line closed years ago?

"Sir?" It was the man he'd bumped heads with. "Are you alright? You look a little pale."

"I think... I think I need to sit down."

"Take my arm."

As the man led him to the benches John noticed the passing humanity, their feet clicking over the concourse. They seemed so smart, the fabric of their clothes so subdued, richer somehow, warmer.

“Here you are, old chap, take a seat.”

John sat and put his head in his hands. His brain felt like it was pulsing in his skull.

“John?”

Somewhere, far off, came a whistle of departure.

He looked up. The light was back; harsh, excoriating. It was Anne. She was frowning.

“Are you alright, love?”

He nodded and looked down at his clenched fist.

“What have you got there?”

He opened his hand. A large copper coin.

One penny.

The King’s head.

THE END

***17 VIDEOS TUTORIAL WRITING COURSE***

***BY***

***STEVEN HAVELOCK***

***£3***

***WWW.Dynamicink09.com***

[Return to Contents](#)

SEX LINE by Christopher T Dabrowski  
Translated by Monika Olasek

1. The quarrel

—Jesus, not that again!—Mark growled with anxiety.—Why do you need that fucking job if it is so tiring? Why, tell me! We can enough money, you don't have to work!

—Ohhh, and maybe I should just wash your socks, milord?—Joanna hissed.—Cook food? Maybe even wipe your bottom? If I were a mother I would give up my job!

—You know we can't

—We can—you just have to say yes.

—It wouldn't be mine!

—Who is the father? Some anonymous sperm donor or a man who brings up a child and loves him?

—I said no! End of discussion!—He turned his back on her, covered himself with a blanket and switched the light off.

Always the same thing. He tried to stop the tears. Always the same fucking thing! Can't she understand? I cannot do this! The baby wouldn't be a part of me. How could I love that child? How!?

More and more often he was wondering if their marriage had still any sense. He couldn't give her what she wanted. He felt defective, worse. And Joanna just kept on humiliating him, understanding—null. He couldn't remember the last time they made love. It must have been before the doctors told him “We're sorry, there's nothing we can do.” She was always tired because of that fucking job of hers. A kindergarten teacher, big thing! She earns shit, comes back home dead tired and still claims she is happy. His business was doing well enough for them to do nothing, relax or go out to the cinema, or have dinner in a fancy restaurant.

Or maybe she is just teasing me? Maybe I am not attractive anymore? What kind of a man am I since I can't make a woman pregnant?

The sun was shining gently through half lowered window blinds. He opened his eyes and yawned, stretching all muscles like a cat. Joanna was already gone; she was in that damned kindergarten of hers, as usual. He went to the kitchen to make breakfast—of course his dearest wife prefers somebody else's spoilt brats to her own husband.

There was a letter on the table. He took it, but even without reading he knew what it said. He was right.

—Don't wait up. After work I'm going to Lucy, we have a girls' evening.

No “good morning,” no “kisses,” just dry information written in hurry.

Is this the way a loving woman should behave?—he thought.—We’ll have quiet days again.—On the other hand, the “quiet days” last for a good couple of months. The moments of normality were just small oases on a desert of silence and lack of understanding.

He looked into the fridge. Just poor scraps. A woman on a diet...

—What is she thinking? Am I to do everything?—He got angry.—I run a business, I earn money, and what do I get? Is this the way she is repaying me?—He kicked a cupboard.

When he cooled off a bit he took out some beer and deciding to take a day off from being a boss, he ordered a pizza. Like a beaten dog he went to the sitting room, where the main point was a huge plasma TV set—his best comforter.

He turned on a DVD of ‘I Am Legend.’

He wanted to compare the book with the film for a long time, although in his opinion the film could never be as good as the original.

This is why he always read the book first and then watched the film. He was sorry for those who did the other way round, because if he saw the “Ruins” he would later know the ending of the book and it wouldn’t be so surprising. The book was a whole lot better, more complex, full. Moreover, a mind polluted with the screen version would show the pictures from the movie; Mark would rather leave it to his own imagination (after all, it was the best director!).

He was sitting, watching, eating pizza and drinking beer. Then he was just drinking beer after beer and eventually he felt a soothing felicity.

When the film ended, he was a bit drunk.

## 2. Sex line

Mark was running around as if he had an attack of epilepsy. Suddenly he fell to his knees and bent backward risking a serious back injury. His forehead was wet from sweat, eyes were bloody and his neck arteries were fully visible. His hands were twisted. The right one was rhythmically trembling, the fingers of the left one were twisted as if he was a paralytic.

—Dooooonnnnt crayiaaayaayaayayayayayyyyyy!—he pretended to be his favourite singer, the legend who became an auto irony. Axl Rose—frontman of Guns’n’Roses.

For a moment he kept this dangerous pose and shot up when he heard a rap piece from the television. He winced and turned the volume down.

Those were the days, he thought with a touch of tenderness. When he was young, he wanted to be a guitar player and play incredible solos like Slash. Unfortunately he soon discovered that six strings were far too much for his capabilities. He turned to bass guitar but his fingers

were still too stiff. He didn't even dare to dream about singing. His voice was not good enough.

—Yeah, buddy, you, up there. Could you tell me why you refuse me talent?

All he heard was a silent rumbling in the TV.

You refuse me everything. I can't even make a baby, he thought bitterly. And why? Is this fun for you? At least you gave me a nose for a business.

—*Buuu* be frank—he continued out loud.—I would be glad to change that.

Take away the money, the house, whatever you wish, just make me fertile!—Yes, he wanted a baby, but a baby that would be his 100%.

He would never accept the thought that it didn't come from his sperm. Either way, all the time, deep in his heart he hoped that the advance of technology will soon be able to help him somehow. Unfortunately, Joanna didn't understand him.

He fell asleep on the couch. When he woke up, he saw that his TV was tuned into one of those paid porno channels. He was surprised—he didn't remember changing the channel.

It was getting dark outside. His head was pulsing with an unbearable pain—this made him feel even worse—and on the screen some lollitite was twisting and asking in a bitchy voice to call her. Mark really needed to talk to someone, to complain. It didn't matter if it were a friend—on the other hand a friend was out of the question; he couldn't tell anyone he knew that he was lacking something—or a complete stranger, a chick from a sex line. And after all who was the chick? He could bet that on the other side there will be some pensioner pretending to be a young woman and at the same time reading a magazine “A Housewife”. Or he could get a student, earning some shitty money by doing something that made her sick. A poor girl who dreamt about a career in a big city and now has to pretend she is a hot bitch. He didn't care at all, he just wanted to talk, that's all—it could even be the dog, as long as he could get rid of the shit in his mind.

He dialled and after a while he heard a groaning voice:

—Meow, hi tiger.

—Meow, meow, hi—he jeered.

—Mhmmm, what would you like, you brute, I would...

—I just want to talk—he cut her short.

—Ohhh, yessss, let'sssssssssss talk!

—Listen! I'm talking; you're just listening to me, okay?

—Mhmmmmmm, whatever you wish, my lord. Cassandra will listen to you.



If somebody told him that for two or three hours he would confess to a girl from the sex line, he would call him a lunatic. But never say “never”. Being in a strange state half way between being well drunk and having a major hangover, he kept on talking. And he felt more and more relieved. The girl was a good listener, she didn’t interrupt him even once. She just mumbled a short “mhm” from time to time, to indicate she was still listening (or at least making such impression).

As time was passing by, the monologue turned into a dialogue. He started asking about her life, and to his surprise she answered; not with a purring screwing voice, but normally. They were talking.

### 3. Cassandra

It was to be another convict’s day, full of moaning and panting perverts. In front of her there was a book by Stephen King, ‘Salem’s Lot’ (her favourite horror, she had read it already twice and now she was starting the third session). She took it to work, because she had hoped she would be able to read a bit between the clients. Unfortunately, today the telephone was ringing all the time.

Fucking perverts, she thought.

After a few almost-coming-to-a-climax macho onanists, somebody nice called—she was listening with pleasure. A guy with a nice voice; life was really hard on him. The longer he was talking, the closer he seemed. He kept on talking and second after second, minute after minute she was imagining a picture of an ideal man. She even thought that she would like to meet him. Break the rules and meet a client. Maybe even make a pass at him? It was strange, just an hour of talking...

Suddenly she noticed that an SS man—that’s what she called a tall scrag with a tightly closed, pale lips, who was doing his round from time to time to check if everything was okay—was coming toward her.

—Ohhhhhhhhhh, yesssssssssss!—she moaned, begging the client not to hung up.

The SS man stopped behind her back while she was moaning and murmuring, telling how wet her pussy was.

She was wondering why he was still standing there. Was there something wrong? Maybe he knew she was just pretending? But how? She felt a stab of panic, so she concentrated on moaning and murmuring even harder. Suddenly she realized what her mistake was, but it was too late. The mistake was in the controller’s hands. After a while the book landed on the table. The SS man wagged his finger on her and went to bother somebody else.

—Are you still there?—she asked in a trembling voice.

—Yeah—he answered.—Were they checking on you?

—Mhm.

The more she knew about him, the more convinced she was that she had met a friendly soul. Unfortunately, he would most probably complain and hang up, going back to his sad reality—he would just put down the receiver and forget about the “moaning girl”. But nothing of that kind happened. Just the opposite—he started asking: who she really was, what she does when she doesn’t work. He was asking and asking, and she was telling him more and more about herself. Suddenly she heard a surprising proposition.

—Will you give me your number?

She was astonished. For a while she was unable to speak.

—Ahh, you can’t. Sorry for asking.

—No, no, wait! Do you have something to write?—He had. She couldn’t believe she was doing that, but she gave him the number.

She was hoping he would call, that he would not stick the card into his pocket and forget about it.

She had been living there for almost a year and she didn’t have any friends, not to mention anyone to love. She wanted to fill this emptiness and here you are—fate sent her this cool guy. She was sorry for his infertility. She wasn’t much after children herself. She didn’t know why, but she had a dislike for them—to that crying, whining, those dirty diapers—she didn’t want to be a mother.

When Mark hung up, the SS man came back again. She moaned to a silent phone a sweet “Byeye, tigerrrr,” smacked her lips a few times and put the receiver down. He believed her play and went away. She sighed with relief not noticing that he turned back. He took the book and hissed:

—Hide this! I’ll see it once again and...—he was interrupted by a ringing phone.

No matter how dirty the pervert calling was, she was deeply grateful for saving her from SS man’s blow up.

—Mrrrrrrrr, hi therrrrrrrrre, you tigerrrrrrrrrr! she was moaning and murmuring again, but her thoughts were far, far away. She was wondering if Mark would ever call again or would he forget. She wanted to hear from him so badly.

In the evening, when she got back home, no one called. The next day the phone was still silent and she was quite convinced that the card had died tragically in the intestines of the washing machine, when suddenly the phone rang.

It was HIM!

#### 4. Getting Ready

Hmmmm, jacket? Maybe the white one... no, no way! A blue shirt. A tie? Yes, but which one? No, no, this doesn't make sense, it's too stiff. It would be better to look "loose and cool"; Mark was trying to choose the proper outfit to make the best impression possible. Eventually instead of a shirt he put on his favourite turtle necked sweater.

Mark was in his late twenties—a strange age when you are still young but feeling a heavy breath of old age on your back. Once thirty years of age was a complete abstraction to him, but now he was beginning to get scared. Every day more. He realized how fast the time flew. When he was twenty he looked at thirty year olds as people near their pensioner's age—and now, within a flash, he was thirty. He was beginning to see the first symptoms of the fact that his organism is heading toward self-destruction—the first blind spots where once bushy hair was. First grey hair showed here and there. What will happen when he is forty? Again, within a flash he will open his eyes and have a fourth cross on his back. Terrifying!

Sometimes he thought that maybe this is the last call for serious changes. Soon some doors may become inevitably closed. He was wondering if Joanna was the woman he was looking for. Everything seemed to say no—their marriage was falling apart. His work—was it something he wants to do for the rest of his life? Did he want to live here or somewhere else? Did he.....? Did he.....? Did he.....? Did he.....? Did he.....?

More and more questions without answers.

A moment ago he asked a complete stranger, a girl whom he had never seen, out to dinner. He didn't know what had got into him. Maybe this would provide the impulse to make some changes? Maybe he would feel that something he had once felt for Joanna? If not, then maybe he'd find a friend (she was such a good listener and then such a good talker). He didn't know why he had asked her out. Looking for excitement, incentive in a time of crisis? Looking for a real emotion? Friendship? Or maybe he just wanted to thank her for listening to him.

He went out. The taxi was waiting.

By the way, if it turned out that Joanna was not Mrs. Right and he would fall for that Cassandra girl... Well, if they had to tell the family where they had met...

—Mom, dad... on the sex line. Ohhh, how very romantic! Hahaha!

## 5. Investigation

—"Wednesday—Mariacka 16:30"—Well, well, how empty headed men can be, she thought, putting the card into the back pocket of his trousers and throwing them into the washing machine.—Let him think I don't know about anything.

In the last two days his behaviour had been strange, which of course roused some suspicions. He stopped grumbling about her giving up the job. He didn't try to undress her. And, although he was trying to hide it, he was excited. Now she was sure—there was someone else!

Mariacka, one of the best restaurants. She would never believe that now he preferred deli-fucking-cacies to pizza! Yes, she was pissed off, very pissed off, but she decided that it would be better to catch him red handed instead of quarrelling at home.

That day she took a position outside a small bistro opposite “Mariacka” restaurant. She didn’t have to wait long—he was five minutes earlier. He put on his best jacket and turtle necked jumper SHE gave him for his birthday. What a pig! The same turtle necked jumper! And just because she told him he looked sexy wearing it! (Disregarding the fact that for quite a long time and quite a few kilograms, he had never looked sexy...)

—Will you pay in cash or with a card?—asked the waiter, distracting her.

—In cash—she took out two bills.—Keep the change.

She turned around and saw a woman disappear in the doors of Mariacka—she couldn’t tell if the woman was young or not.

He wouldn’t ask an older woman out. She decided to wait a few more minutes—just in case; she wouldn’t want to get into an almost empty restaurant where instead of a lovely couple she would see a lonely Mark. No way! He would surely make excuses.

For the next ten minutes she was watching the entrance, but nobody else showed up. She decided to go in. The restaurant had dark windows so nothing could be seen from the outside.

She had to be careful, in case he was still alone... She covered herself with a scarf and put sunglasses on. She would go straight to the bathroom, so there was practically no risk that he would recognize her. She crossed the street and went into the restaurant.

## 6. Meeting Cassandra

With every minute Mark was getting more and more nervous. He didn’t know why but he was beginning to feel as if this was to be a date.

—O Lord!—he moaned, when a woman looking just like his wife appeared in the restaurant.—She was spying on me.—What now?—Meanwhile, the woman smiled at him, came to his table and sat down.

—Hi! You’re Mark, right?

—Y-y-y—he started to stammer, feeling a big lead ball in the place where once his stomach was.

What’s going on, what the fuck is going on?!—he kept on repeating this question in his mind, paralyzed with surprise.

—I’m Cassandra. Nice to meet you.

Jesus Christ! What is she playing?—he was wandering, what was going on.—Was she tapping the phone? It looks that way! You’ve had it, you fool!

—Am I intimidating you?—she asked.—I think so. On the phone, you are anonymous, but here, now...—suddenly she scowled.

Okay, so she’s got me, but why doesn’t she start yelling? Why doesn’t she slap him across the face? What is she playing?—The distressing questions were appearing and disappearing at the speed of light.

—I am also a bit, you know, nervous, you know, y-y-y, that is why I keep talking. I always do that—she smiled nervously.

It can’t be, I’m hallucinating because of guilt or it’s Joanna, she had a shock and went crazy—he felt sweat pouring all over him. His heart was beating wildly, there were more and more questions—she wants to humiliate me.

—Frankly speaking, my name is not Cassandra—his wife said.

Here we go! Now it will start!—he started panicking.—I knew it, I fucking knew it!

—My real name is Monica.

A woman came into the restaurant. It was almost empty, only a single guy in his thirties was sitting in the corner near the window.

It must be him—she thought and smiled at him. He turned pale, as if he was just about to have a heart attack.

Oh God, he doesn’t like me—the thought run through her head.

Sometimes she didn’t understand her behaviour, sometimes she acted as if she wasn’t herself, as if she was somebody else. A blind date with a stranger calling a sex line was completely not like her!

Despite her fears she decided to go on, it was too late to back off. She came to the table and sat down.

—Hi! You’re Mark, right?—she wanted to be sure. It would be really funny if she sat at somebody else’s table thinking he was Mark and that someone turned out to be her Mr. Right. It would be worth remembering!

—Y-y-y—the man could not tell a word, he was nervously banging with his fingers.

Poor thing, he is so tense—she thought.—And I assumed he doesn’t like me. He obviously wanted to say yes, that is he is Mark.



—I'm Cassandra. Nice to meet you—she decided to take control. After all, on the phone he was a really nice guy, maybe he is just a bit shy. Well, he'll be better in a while, he'll be as cool as on the phone.

The man was silent. He was sweating hard and biting his lips. She wanted to take his hand, but she decided it was far too brave. Especially, if she worked on the sex line. She didn't want to be an easy chick.

—Am I intimidating you?—she asked.

Way to go, stupid!—She regretted her words.—You've just kicked the man when he's down. He knows far too well he is nervous! It won't calm him down if you confirm that it shows. He'll get even more stressed.

Idiot! Idiot! Idiot!

But since she said "A," she must also say "B," otherwise it will be awkward. And he will suffer and get some not very nice complexes. Oh, no, she must save the situation!

—I guess what it feels like. On the phone, you are anonymous, but here, now...—she stopped because Mark looked as if he saw a ghost, his eyes were wide opened.

She had the weird feeling that she had seen his face before. Then she realised whom he reminded her of—her boss. She saw him once, when he introduced the "SS man" and was explaining to him what his duty is. Well, the similarity was close.

O Jesus!—she panicked.—What if the boss was checking on me and I fell for it? No, no, wait a moment, then why all the fuss with this dinner? And why would he be so tense?—she couldn't find the answer.—And maybe he saw me then and ever since was in love with me? Maybe he called on purpose to talk to me, get to know me? No way, stupid idea. He is similar to your boss but that doesn't mean that Mark and the boss are the same person.

They are just similar, and you are imagining things.

Mark was almost having a heart attack, so she pushed those thoughts aside.

I have to calm him down!—she decided.

—I am also a bit, you know, nervous, you know, y-y-y, that is why I keep on talking. That's what I do when I'm nervous.—That's it, let him know he is not the only one shy here. It is better when there are two of us!

But the man still looked scared, her declaration didn't help. So she had to keep talking. Whatever, just to keep silence at bay.

And where is the fucking waiter? Looking through the menu would surely ease the tension a bit.

—And my real name is not Cassandra.

Mark was white as sheet, he swallowed hard.

Maybe he has stomach problems?—she thought.—A lot of people living in stress has such problems.

—My real name is Monica.

She looked into his eyes but he staring at something above her head. And it couldn't be the waiter because Mark was terrified!

Joanna went quickly into the bathroom.

She left the door open. She took a deep breath to calm down a bit. It was a long time since she was so nervous and scared at the same time. She was hoping it all would turn out to be one huge misunderstanding. Yes, the relationship was not a fairy tale, but... She turned around and she started to investigate the room through the open door. A strangely pale Mark was sitting in the corner. On the other side of the table a woman was sitting.

So it is true!—she worried.

She leaned against the wall. She wanted to do it calmly—say whatever she has to say, look into that bitch's face—but she knew it will not end like this. Savage rage was pouring out of her.

She went out of the bathroom and marched towards the couple. She stood behind the woman and looked into Mark's face. The bastard was scared to death—this could mean only one thing.

—You bastard!—she hissed.

He opened his mouth, like a fish thrown out of the water, and looked at her with his eyes wide open.

When the girl turned around, Joanna's legs couldn't hold her any longer. This was not what she had expected! This was not possible! She couldn't find any reasonable explanation. Even the fact that her husband was cheating on her was second important at the moment. Second? It was reduced into a minor, unimportant event.

She was looking into a woman's face and she saw... HERSELF!

—Oh my God!—she moaned.

—Me... you... well...—her reflection seemed to be as surprised as she was.

Did they keep something from me?—The thought was like a thunder strike.

The girl started to get up, she was as pale as Mark.

—Sit down—she murmured calmly.—I won't harm you.

—Y-y-y—cut in her husband; well, actually he was already her ex-husband.

—Shut up!—she hissed.

Without taking her eyes off the girl she took out her mobile and dialled her parents' number.

—Hello—An elderly man answered the phone.

—Dad, is there something I don't know about?

There was a sudden silence.

—Do I have a sister?

—Darling. Me and your mum... We...

—What did you keep from me?—she insisted.

—O God, forgive us! We wanted to tell you so many times.

—About what? Tell me!

—You are adopted, darling, we...—She didn't hear the rest, she felt dizzy. She almost fainted. Waves of heat, of confusing thoughts and questions, winding like worms on corpse, questions she didn't want to ask were flooding her mind.

And yet she had to ask them.

—You are not my biological parents?

—No—her foster father was crying.—No darling.

—Do I have a sister?

—Will you forgive us?

—Do I have a sister?

—We don't know, darling, we really don't. Nobody knows. You were abandoned at the... orphanage...—He assured her with a trembling voice and then gave her the phone number to the facility.

She hung up. She knew she was breaking hearts of people who loved her, but she couldn't continue the conversation. It was too much—her life turned upside down, not one time, it was turning somersaults like a crazy clown.

The next several dozen minutes was like a surreal dream. Mark, silent, white as snow. Her, almost for sure, twin sister looking at her as if she was a kind of an alien. And a waiter, afraid

to come (finally he gathered all his courage and got an order... one glass of water). And of course there was she, calling orphanages.

For a start she dialled the number her father gave her. They supported his tale.

Father?... Yes, he was her father!

She was a foundling. Her biological parents were one big mystery. She asked if any other new born was abandoned at the same time. No, it wasn't.

Where did her strength come from in that weird situation? How did she manage to think clearly? She didn't know, but she knew what had to be done. She called the information to get the phone numbers to all orphanages; those who abandoned her at the same time must have abandoned her—she was sure—twin sister. She was about to write down the first number when she heard a silent whisper:

—I came from Bronowice.

Joanna hung up.

And the same again. She called Bronowice, the only orphanage there. They weren't able to help; a couple of years before the facility was completely burned and all documentation was lost.

Fuck!—she thought.—You can do DNA tests. It would confirm everything.

—Let's go to your place—Joanna proposed.—I would rather not go to my place—she added pointing her head at Mark.—I would like to get to know you.

The girl didn't even look at him, she was staring at Joanna like a moose staring at a speeding truck. It must have been a huge shock for her too. She just nodded her head.

Joann left the money on the table and the sisters left, leaving shocked Mark alone.

## 7. Number one

—Doctor Schenker! Doctor Schenker!—Adams rushed into the laboratory.—A blunder! Number one met the original!

Schenker became gloomy. He was afraid this would happen one day. They did their best to avoid all the black scenarios, but apparently it didn't work.

For over ten years of experiment they had been calm. They created clones and turned them into cyborgs by introducing hundreds of nanochips into their heads. In the result they had creatures in human body with independent consciousness but all the time they were

investigated and monitored by a group of scientists, who could create microsurvoltages on the synapses and control their decisions.

What's more, they could even control the cyborgs' bodies. They tried not to abuse this function because the object had a feeling of being possessed, of an unknown, sinister force taking over his body.

The microchips allowed coding artificial memories, personality parameters and basic features of character. The final goal was to create fully controlled superhumans, who could become soldiers ready to perform heroic sacrifices or volunteer to dangerous missions. Of course they would think they make decisions for themselves, but in the reality all their deeds would be the orders from headquarters.

These were the short term plans. The next stage would be implanting the chips into normal people (at birth and on the pretext of vaccination against a false disease) and taking control over the whole society and eventually—after many hundred years—all the Earth inhabitants. Mighty supercomputers would transmit various programs to people's minds all the time—finally an ideal society would be created: one that loves peace, locks violence, without inclination to cigarettes, alcohol, drugs and focused not on earthly pleasures but on intellectual development and using it for the good of humankind.

The idea of the microchips was born in the 1970s. The governments still hide the fact that alien civilizations do exist—and what is more, we still cooperate with them. They have active influence on our technical development. They help people in changing the society so that in the several hundred years we will be ready join the cosmic family.

When the social transformation is be finished, all the barriers that protect the alien civilization from curious eyes of the scientists will be removed. Everybody will be ready to hear the crucial facts.—It will only take the Earth government to transmit certain programs and everyone will be deeply convinced that we are not alone in the universe. It will be all very natural.

Yes, in several hundred years Earth will become paradise, a part of so called Cosmic Union. Now we are at the beginning of a long and bumpy road. Ten years ago government of the United States, controlling everything—no matter which government and president are temporarily elected—decided to create a secret laboratory to initiate the process of change in the society.

Of course the whole project became top secret. The priority was to keep it from nosy journalists and secret services of other countries (there were plenty of them in the USA). For the sake of security it was decided that the project will be carried out in Poland—the backwoods of the European Union.

Why here? Here nobody would ever know what was going on. The intelligence service in this country practically does not exist. Police is corrupt, government even more so. One can easily eliminate undesirable persons and no one will ever know what has happened to them. And what is most important, this constantly waving its little sword small country is practically clean in means of intelligence officers of other countries—frankly speaking, who would take interest in this little country? What is their influence to the world? What technical



possibilities do they have? Militarily and scientifically they are also underdeveloped. Which secret service would investigate such a country? None!

—What are our procedures?—Adams asked nervously.

—Destroy the original. Her husband too. We can't take a risk.

—And what about Number One?

—Bring her here. Destroy her memory and introduce new one.

—Yes sir!

THE END

[Return to Contents](#)

MISS THING by Carlton Herzog

The students at Montgomery High did not like Frank Pope. Unlike other substitute teachers, he expected his students to work and work hard, so long as he was running the class; for another, he didn't take any sass. Backtalk and you were in detention for a month.

When he arrived on the fateful day in question, Principal Edwards pulled him aside. He tried to explain to Pope what had recently changed at the school.

"Two weeks ago, we admitted a transfer student. One Melanie Powers. She'll be in your class today. My advice is to tread lightly where she's concerned."

"And why is that, Mr. Edwards?" Pope asked.

"Haven't you been watching the news? Haven't you seen all the coverage about that special girl?"

"I've heard about her. Frankly I'm sceptical about the whole thing."

"As am I, but until you hear differently from me, it's better to treat her with kid gloves."

"Fine. Kid gloves. Wide berth. Anything else?"

"Be careful."

And that's where Principal Edwards left it.

When he arrived at his history class that morning, Pope took attendance from a list. There was no seating chart. However, Melanie Powers, though present, did not answer when Pope called her name. Frank Pope was puzzled. Every seat was filled. And he had read every name on the attendance list. But no one answered to Melanie Powers.

Pope took umbrage at the lack of a seating chart—there had always been one before. He was in no mood to stop and make one. The most expedient thing to do it seemed was to simply ask the class.

And he did. "Has anyone has seen Melanie Powers?" No one answered. In fact, all the students put their heads down and covered their ears. "What the hell is this?" Frank Pope asked himself.

He walked over to the desk nearest him, bent down and said, "You are Charlie Richards, yes?" The boy's head bobbed up and down in agreement. Pope then asked, "Charlie, have you seen Melanie Powers?"

Charlie looked up at him and whispered, "Please don't make me answer that question!" Pope whispered, "Just nod if she's in the room." After a moment's hesitation, Charlie nodded—quietly almost imperceptibly, but nod he did.

Pope suspected that Melanie was the girl looking absentmindedly out the window.

Pope very nonchalantly walked over to where Melanie sat. He stood over her for a moment waiting for her turn and face him. But she didn't. It was as if he weren't there.

So, he opened the conversation. "Melanie, why didn't you answer when I called your name?"

She turned toward him letting her gaze meet his. Then she said, "My name is not Melanie. It's Miss Thing, and I'll thank you to remember that when you address me!"

Pope thought, "Arrogant little bitch." Then he said, "You'll answer to the name on the attendance sheet, unless you want detention."

Melanie grinned. "Am I speaking Latin, Mr. Pope? What part of Miss Thing did you not understand?" Pope turned beet red. He wanted to slap her. Instead, he said, "Alright young lady, we're going to see Principal Edwards." And with that he grabbed her arm.

In all fairness, Pope had not been properly briefed by Principal Edwards. Then again Edwards was working with incomplete knowledge as was everyone else who had had dealings with Melanie.

Prior to matriculating at Montgomery, Melanie had caused a ruckus at her old high school. Specifically, she had threatened to strike several classmates and teachers with lightning, did so, then openly claimed responsibility for the acts.

Naturally there were many doubters. But a few more prophecies—plagues of frog and locusts, earthquakes and volcanoes—followed by their immediate fulfilment turned many a sceptic into a believer.

She started defying her parents. And doing things to them as well. When they tried to impose a curfew, she waved her arms and sent their car into orbit.

Her parents turned to the police. That didn't work out very well, so the police asked the FBI for help. That didn't work either.

The last attempt at containment and control came from a SEAL team that tried to capture her as she slept. Unfortunately, no one expected that she would be guarded by a team of her own avatars, creatures of pure telekinetic energy immune to the tawdry weapons of humankind.

Nobody, not even Melanie herself, can say for sure, how she went from whiney, pre-pubescent teen ager to super being overnight. Adding to the puzzle, Melanie insisted on living life as an ordinary middle class kid right down to doing her schoolwork. And while most of her classmates feared her, she still had female friends and a boyfriend. Clearly, there was an insistent yearning on her part to fit in, even though, it's fair to say, she wasn't entirely clear where that was supposed to be. But she wasn't in a hurry.

Pope knew none of this. But as he rematerialized ignominiously seated on a toilet seat among the moons of Saturn, he suspected that he had just made the biggest mistake of his life.

After a few moments, he realized that he was neither suffocating nor freezing. "She must be keeping me alive," he mused. "That's right, pinhead," a voice inside his head bellowed, "I am keeping you alive. Do you have anything to say for yourself?"

Pope didn't hesitate. "I think Miss Thing is a wonderful name and I would be honoured to call it on the roll."

Then there was only silence. Then Saturn and its rings were gone. He sat staring at a yawning abyss into which the stars themselves poured in a great star fall of light and colour. And as the light around him faded, and the black shroud of nothing closed in around him, he was back in that classroom calling the roll as if he had never left.

THE END

[Return to Contents](#)

## SOLDIERS OF MISFORTUNE by Rex Mundy

### 5. The Amazon

A cry pealed out from the doorway and the pressure round my neck eased.

Storey leapt to his feet. The girl stood there, in the entrance, gripping the bars, the girl who had taken us prisoner in the first place. She addressed Storey in Tamasheq, and he replied tersely.

‘What’s she saying, old man?’ I asked, clambering to my feet.

As calmly as if he hadn’t been half throttling me a moment before, Storey replied, ‘She begs us not to fight, but rather to consider the fate in store for us.’

‘Come to taunt, has she?’ I asked wryly.

Storey shook his head. ‘I think not. She says that she fears for... for us. That we will become the property of the old queen. She does not desire that. “Thou art too handsome for such a fate,” she adds boldly. I’m very much afraid it’s me she’s talking about, old man.’

I glanced from him to the girl, whose eyes were wide with adoration. Why is it that women are always attracted to thoroughly bad lots like Storey? But my fellow Old Boy was crimson with embarrassment.

Shouldering up to the bars I fixed the girl with a commanding expression. ‘Look here, young lady,’ I said, then broke off. ‘What is her name?’ I asked Storey.

‘Sula,’ Storey told me after a brief dialogue.

‘Look here, Sula,’ I said. When she gave me a look of blank incomprehension, I tried, ‘Regarde ici, Sula...’ After all the natives in this part of l’Afrique du Nord spoke French.

Storey laughed. ‘She speaks only Tamasheq, and the mysterious language of the Azzi. I’ll have to translate for you.’

I eyed him suspiciously, half consciously rubbing at my bruised throat. ‘Very well,’ I said reluctantly. ‘Tell her that if she fears for us, she can help us escape. Find where they keep the keys and unlock this gate.’ I pounded the bars with my fist.

Storey pursed his lips. ‘But what about the sergeant? Sula says he is in conference with the queen; incommunicado, old boy.’

He spoke with Sula. Her eyes grew very big, very white in her glossy dark face, and she replied at length.

‘What is she saying?’ I asked when she finished. She reached through the bars to clasp Storey’s broad hand.

Storey disengaged her hand, embarrassed by the show of tenderness. ‘Sula came straight from the audience chamber. Herzog begs the queen to allow us safe passage, but her royal majesty is obdurate. There is nothing Sula can do about it. But she does not want me—*us*—to remain penned in here. She would set us free, and hide us in her own dwelling, out of reach of the queen, but the keys are kept by the chief guard and she cannot get to them.’

I bit my lip in frustration. ‘Ask her about this place, Azzi, or whatever it’s called,’ I urged Storey. ‘The more we know about it, the better able we will be to escape.’

‘I’m not so sure she wants us to escape,’ Storey said after a further dialogue with our winsome young visitor. ‘But she does want us out of the clutches of the queen. It seems she’s quite an ambitious young miss...’

‘What does she say about the Azzi?’ I asked.

‘They have always dwelt here, amidst these rocks,’ Storey replied, ‘since the days when the Sahara was green and thronged with game. Once they ruled an empire dominating the surrounding lands, fought against the folk of a great western island that has since sunk beneath the waves, sent out colonies of their people to settle in other parts of the world. Women have always ruled here, wielding powers sent them by their goddess, and they geld boy children as soon as they are able, taking as their mates slaves who they carry off from surrounding tribes, sacrificing them to their goddesses once they have fathered enough children.

‘But now few tribes come near the mountains in which their still fertile valley is to be found, and they are a dying race. The queen, Sula’s great aunt, is hopeful that, ahem, my virility will reinvigorate the stock of this decadent folk. She is half mad, and thinks I will get her with child, many children. Sula knows that she is beyond child bearing age, that it is time a younger woman took her place. She thinks it would be better if I were to become her lover...’

He coughed. ‘Really, old man, a lot of what this charming young woman has to say is most indelicate...’

‘Damn your delicacy, Storey,’ I told him brusquely. ‘We have to know what they mean to do with us. And me? Do I get myself an Amazon lover too?’

Storey shook his head. ‘You’re not considered virile enough, old man,’ he said. ‘You and the sergeant will both be gelded and join the guards.’

I swallowed.

‘We must get away from here,’ I said firmly. ‘Can the young lady not find some way of inveigling the keys away from the guards?’ A thought struck me. ‘Could she not seduce them somehow...? Oh, no, that won’t work.’ I paused. ‘Ask her how it was that she struck the rifle from the sergeant’s hands.’

Storey spoke, and Sula answered. Her explanation piqued my interest. ‘All of the royal Amazonian blood learn such mental powers in their youngest girlhood,’ she said dismissively. ‘To speak with each other mind to mind, to move objects without touching,

even to heal with the power of thought alone... all these are signs of descent from the ancient queens of the Amazons. Few possess them today, but I am of the Blood.”

‘Telekinesis!’ I said excitedly. ‘I always knew that it wasn’t a myth.’

‘You surely don’t believe in that nonsense, do you?’ said Storey disapprovingly. ‘All very well for primitives like these natives, but not for white men.’

I flinched. I’d met sceptics before, of course, many times. But I had pursued an abiding interest in these matters for many years, not that it had brought me aught but trouble.

Ignoring his disapproval, I said, ‘Ask Sula if she can bring her powers to bear on the lock!’

Storey looked pained, but relayed my words, and Sula’s eyebrows lifted in amazement. Then she placed her hands to her temples and focused her attention on the lock. For a long time nothing happened.

‘We’re wasting time,’ Storey muttered. ‘She has to find some way of stealing the keys...’

‘Quiet!’ I said. There had been a strange pinging sound from the metal. ‘Something is happening...’

Sula lowered her hands.

‘Sággæð!’ she cried in Tamasheq. She was pointing at the lock in the barred gate.

But to my disappointment I could see no change. Storey snorted, to Sula’s evident dismay. Gently, she thrust against the gate and it swung slowly open.

Storey’s face was a picture. ‘It...’ he gasped. ‘It must have been... unlocked all along!’

‘Of course, old man, of course,’ I murmured. ‘Now let’s stop wasting time and get ourselves out of here.’

We bustled out into the dark stone walled corridor. Sula embraced Storey, much to his discomfiture, and led us off up the cold passage, clutching my fellow countryman’s hand, towards the daylight that filtered in from above.

As we clattered out into a brightly lit chamber, a sudden volley of gunfire rang out.

## 6. Return of the Natives

As my eyes grew accustomed to the light, I realised that we had come out into the throne chamber after our wanderings beneath the ground. It was deserted, and the queen’s sceptre lay upon the throne as if hastily flung down there. From the open gates came more gunfire.

Storey crossed the chamber in a few brief strides, Sula and I at his heels. We came out of the arch to see the city before us a scene of fierce fighting.

Flooding down the main street were the tiny figures of Touaregs. The flashes of their muzzles lit up the brooding buildings as they advanced. Firing back futilely were the remainder of the eunuch guards, but the Touaregs had them outgunned. Bodies lay in the street.

‘How did they get here?’ I asked. How had our pursuers penetrated the land of the Azzi?

‘They must have followed Sula’s riders,’ said Storey, ‘and found the tunnel. They waited for some time, it seems, perhaps gathering together their forces, and now they are attacking the hated oppressors.’

How much of this was his doing? I wondered darkly. How had he signalled to them this time?

Sula cried out, pointing. ‘Sággæd!’

The Touaregs had broken through the ragged line of eunuch guards and now they were bearing down on a group of Azzi women. I saw the bent figure of the queen standing amidst them, a familiar red faced, rotund sergeant at her side.

Most of the Azzi were mounted, and now they began to ride towards the Touaregs who had paused to reload. For a moment I thought the Azzi stood a chance, but before they could reach the plaza where the Touaregs were standing, the raiders reloaded and fired another volley. Women and camels fell, the camels screaming, the women stoically silent.

A few dismounted women produced swords and attacked the Touaregs, but this was the last stand. Before any of us could do anything, the Azzi were dead or fleeing, and I saw the queen as she futilely tried to fire a rifle before she was cut down by one Touareg swordsman. Then they surrounded Sergeant Herzog and began to hustle him away back up the street.

‘We’ve got to get after them,’ Storey said, doing his best to comfort Sula, who was shocked and upset. ‘Get the rifles.’

‘What’s that, old man?’ I said. ‘The queen had a gun. Not that it did her any good.’

He gave me a savage look. ‘The other rifles. They must be back there, in the throne room. Go and get them, while Sula and I organise a counter attack.’

I retreated into the gloom of the great throne chamber. It was almost empty and I searched fruitlessly for the guns. At last I found them, concealed under a flagstone that opened up after some forcing to reveal a pit. Down there winked rubies, sapphires, emeralds, gold and silver—and on top of them lay three rifles.

Shortly afterwards, with one rifle slung over my back, and the second cradled in my arms, I marched back outside.

At the bottom of the steps were several mounted Azzi, a pitiful few who had survived and had not fled. Sula was speaking to them now from the steps, exhorting them in tones of anger and anguish. In her hand was the rifle that the queen had struggled to fire—I must show Sula how to turn off the safety catch, I told myself. At their head was the scar faced older woman who had argued with her when they descended upon our camp. She was arguing again. Storey stood beside Sula, listening uncomprehendingly to their argument.



I approached Storey. At first his face showed welcome, but then he saw I was pointing my rifle at him.

‘Don’t be a fool,’ he said. ‘What do you hope to achieve?’ He indicated the squabbling Azzi with one hand. ‘If it isn’t bad enough that these ladies have fallen to bickering amongst themselves now friend Touareg has created a power vacuum...’

He was a cool ‘un, I’ll give him that. My gun barrel did not waver. ‘I’m not surprised you call the Touaregs your friends,’ I said, ‘since it was you who betrayed us into their hands. And now what do you want, to lure me into another ambush?’

‘What are you talking about?’ he said. ‘I’m not with the Touaregs! Herzog is!’

I lowered the rifle briefly, then raised it again. ‘Don’t forget I know all about you, Storey. You won’t fool me. I know you for a thief and a murderer. Now you’re working for the Touaregs. I saw you signalling to them. Herzog tried to stop you.’

He shook his head tiredly. ‘I am working for the French,’ he told me. ‘As an agent of the Deuxieme Bureau. I was attached to your troop because it was believed that it had been infiltrated by Prussian agents, working with the Touareg to frustrate French interests in North Africa. Herzog is their agent. And it was he who was signalling to them. I tried to stop him. We fought...’

‘Herzog? He’s an American. Besides, the Touareg carried him off as a prisoner.’

Storey shook his head again. ‘They rescued him from their old enemies. No doubt the Touaregs have waited many centuries for a chance to penetrate the Azzi valley. This gave them the excuse. Now Herzog is free to continue his efforts, inciting the desert tribes against France. His German ancestry makes him loyal to the Fatherland, despite his American citizenship.’ He looked pensive. ‘I should think their next step will be to attack a French blockhouse or two. And we must stop him. Are you with me?’

My gun barrel lowered. ‘We’d better get after him,’ I said. ‘Are these the only Azzi to survive?’

He took a rifle from me and led me to where two saddled, riderless camels stood. ‘Others fled the city,’ he said. ‘Sula is trying to persuade them to ride after the Touaregs, but her old rival Tioga, who is also of the royal bloodline, says she is queen now.’

This was no time for palace intrigue. ‘We must ride after the Touaregs,’ I said, and mounted. ‘Who is coming with me?’

When we spotted the Touaregs they were approaching the cliffs, riding on camel back. Even as we watched, they entered the narrow cave mouth that led to the long tunnel we had traversed on coming to this country. Tioga yelled out in anger and frustration, and brandished her spear. She kicked her camel into a gallop and rode after them. Several other Azzi rode after her.

But we were still a long way off, and by the time we all reached the cliffs the last of the Touaregs had already vanished inside. I was itching for a shot at that traitor Herzog, who I saw amongst them, and rode for the tunnel with the hope of shooting him down, but even as I approached, there was a rumble from the top of the cave and rocks began to rain down.

Soon no sign was left of the entrance behind the pile of rubble. Storey rode up, cursing. 'They blocked off the tunnel. Now we can't follow them.'

'It's worse than that!' I cried. 'Now we have no way out of this blessed valley!'

CONTINUES NEXT WEEK

[Return to Contents](#)

## PLANETOID 127 by Edgar Wallace

### Chapter VIII

TIM turned the flyleaf of the manuscript and began reading in an even tone.

*“THE STORY OF NEO.”*

*“My name” (the manuscript began) “is Charles Royton Colson. I am a Master of Arts of the University of Cambridge, science lecturer to Mildram School, and I have for many years been engaged in the study of the Hertzian waves, and that branch of science commonly known as radiology. I claim in all modesty to have applied the principles which Marconi brought nearer to perfection, when wireless telegraphy was unknown. And I was amongst the pioneers of wireless telephony. As is also generally known, I am a mathematician and have written several text books upon astronomy. I am also the author of a well-known monograph on the subject of the Inclinations of the Planetary Orbits; and my treatise on the star Oyonis is familiar to most astronomers.*

*“For many years I engaged myself in studying the alterations of ellipses following the calculations and reasonings of Lagrange, who to my mind was considerably less of a genius than Professor Adams, to whom the credit for the discovery of Neptune should be given... “*

Here followed a long and learned examination of the incidence of Neptune’s orbit, as influenced by Uranus.

*“...My astronomical and radiological studies were practically carried on at the same time. In June, 1914, my attention was called to a statement made by the Superintendent of the great wireless telegraph station outside Berlin, that he had on three separate occasions taken what he described as ‘slurred receptions’ from an unknown station. He gave excellent technical reasons why these receptions could not have come from any known station, and he expressed the opinion, which was generally scoffed at, that the messages he had taken came from some extra-terrestrial source. There immediately followed a suggestion that these mysterious dashes and dots had come from Mars. The matter was lost sight of owing to the outbreak of the European War, and when, in 1915, the same German engineer stated that he had received a distinct message of a similar character, the world, and particularly the Allied world, rejected the story, for the credibility of the Germans at that period did not stand very high.*

*“A year later, the wireless station at Cape Cod also reported signals, as did a private station in Connecticut; whilst the Government station at Rio de Janeiro reported that it had heard a sound like ‘a flattened voice.’ It was obvious that these stories were not inventions, and I set to work on an experimental station which I had been allowed to set up at the school, and after about six months of hard toil I succeeded in fashioning an instrument which enabled me to test my theories. My main theory was that, if the sound came from another world, it would in all probability be pitched in a key that would be inaudible to human ears. For example, there is a dog whistle which makes no sound that we detect, but which is audible to every dog. My rough amplifier had not been operating for a week when I began to pick up scraps of signals and scraps of words—unintelligible to me, but obviously human speech. Not only was I able to hear, but I was able to make myself heard; and the first startling discovery I made was that it took my voice a thousand and seven seconds to reach the person who was speaking to me.*

*“I was satisfied now that I was talking to the inhabitants of another world, though, for my reputation’s sake, I dared not make my discovery known. After hard experimental work, I succeeded in clarifying the voices, and evidently the person at the other end was as anxious as I to make himself understood and to understand the nature of his unknown correspondent’s speech.*

*“You may imagine what a heart breaking business it was, with no common vocabulary, invisible to one another, and living possibly in conditions widely different, to make our meaning clear to one another. We made a start with the cardinal numbers, and after a week’s interchange we had mastered these. I was then struck with the idea of pouring a glass of water from a tumbler near to my microphone, and using the word ‘water.’ In half an hour I heard the sound of falling water from the other end and the equivalent word, which will be found in the vocabulary. I then clapped my hands together, and used the word ‘hand.’ With these little illustrations, which took a great deal of time, began the formation of the dictionary. In the Neo language there are practically no verbs and few adjectives. Very much is indicated by a certain inflexion of voice; even the tenses are similarly expressed; and yet, in spite of this, the Neothians to whom I spoke had no very great difficulty, once I had learnt the art of the inflexion, in supplying the English equivalent.*

*“All the time I was searching the heavens in the vain endeavour to discover the exact location of this world, which was, from the description I had, exactly the same size as ours, and therefore should have been visible. I had maps of the southern hemispheres, reports from the astronomers of Capetown and Brisbane, but they could offer me no assistance. It was certain that there was in the heavens no visible planetary body as big as Neo.*

*“The chief difficulty I had lay in the fact that the voices invariably came from the direction of the sun; and it was as certain as anything could be that life could not exist on that great golden mass. Notwithstanding this, unless my mirror was turned to the sun, I received no message whatever; and even in the middle of the night, when I was communicating with Neo, it was necessary that I should follow, the sun’s course.*

*“Then came the great eclipse, and, as you know, I went to the South Sea Islands to make observations. It was our good fortune to have fine weather, and at the moment of total eclipse I took several particularly excellent photographs, some of which you will find in the portfolio marked ‘L.’ In these and photographs taken by other astronomers, you will see, if you make a careful observation, close to the corona, a tiny speck of light, which at first I thought was my world, but which afterwards I discovered was a dead mass of material upon which it was impossible for life to exist.*

*“One night, when I was turning over the matter in my mind, and examining each photograph in the study of my house on the Thames, the solution flashed on me. This tiny speck, which was not a star, and was certainly not Vulcan, was the satellite of another world, and that world was moving on the same orbit as our own earth, following exactly the same course, but being, as it was, immediately opposite to us behind the sun, was never visible! On whatever part of the ellipse we might be, the sun hid our sister world from us, and that was why the voice apparently came from the sun, for it was through the solar centre that the waves must pass. Two earths chasing one another along the same path, never overtaking, never being overtaken, balancing one another perfectly! It was a stupendous thought!*

*“I conveyed to my unknown friend, who called himself Colson, though I am under the impression that that was due to a misconception on his part as to what Colson meant—he probably thought that ‘Colson’ was the English word for ‘scientist’—and I asked him to make observations. These he sent to me after a few days, confirming my theory. It was after we had begun to talk a little more freely, and my acquaintance with the language had increased so that I could express myself clearly, that it occurred to me there was an extraordinary similarity both in our lives and our environment. And this is the part in my narrative which you will find difficult to believe—I discovered that these two worlds were not only geographically exact, but that the incidents of life ran along on parallel lines. There were great wars in Neo, great disasters, which were invariably duplicated on our earth, generally from two to three days before or after they had happened in this new world. Nor was it only the convulsions of nature that were so faithfully reproduced. Men and women were doing in that world exactly as we were doing in ours. There were Stock Exchanges and street cars, railways, aeroplanes, as though twin worlds had produced twin identities; twin inspirations.*

*“I learnt this first when my friend told me that he had been seeking me for some time. He said that he had had a broken knee some five years ago, and during his enforced leisure he had pointed out the possibility of his having another identity. He said he was frequently feeling that the person he met for the first time was one in reality whom he had seen before; and he was conscious that the thing he did today, he had done a week before. That is a sensation which I also have had, and which every human being has experienced.*

*“But to go back to the story of his having been laid up with a broken knee. He had no sooner told me this than I realised that I also had had a broken knee—I had a spill on my motor bicycle—and that I had spent the hours of my leisure pondering the possibility of there being another inhabited planet! There is a vulgar expression, frequently met with amongst neurotic people, that they have twin souls. In very truth this man was my twin soul: was me, had lived my life, thought my thoughts, performed every action which I performed. The discovery staggered me, and I began to fear for my reason; so I went to London and consulted an eminent Harley Street specialist. He assured me that I was perfectly normal and sane, and offered me the conventional advice that I should go away for a holiday.*

*“Then one day my astral friend, Colson, incidentally mentioned that there was great excitement in his town because a man had bought some steel stock which had since risen considerably in price—he mentioned the name—and, glancing through a newspaper, I saw the name of a stock which sounded very similar to that of which he had told me. Moreover, the price was very much as he had mentioned it; and the wild idea occurred to me that if happenings were actually duplicated, I might possibly benefit by my knowledge. With great trepidation I invested the whole of my savings, which were not very considerable, in these shares, and a few days later had the gratification of selling out at a colossal profit. I explained to my friend at the next opportunity what I had done, and he was considerably amused, and afterwards took an almost childish delight in advising me as to the violent fluctuations in various stocks. For years I have bought and sold with considerable benefit to myself. Not only that, but I have been able to warn Governments of impending disasters. I informed the Turkish Government of the great Armenian earthquake, and warned the Lamborn Shipping Company of the terrible disaster which overtook one of their largest liners—though I was not thanked for my pains.*

*“After this had been going on for some years, I was prepared to learn that my friend had incurred the enmity of a rich man, whom he called Frez on his side, and that this had been brought about unwittingly through me. For this is a curious fact: not everything on this new world is three days in advance of ours. Often it happened that the earth was in advance, and I was able, in our exchanges, to tell him things that were happening here which had not yet occurred in Neo, with the result that he followed my example, and in the space of a year had become a very rich man.*

*“Colson, as I called him, had a servant, whose name I have never learnt; he was called the equivalent to ‘helper,’ and I guess, rather than know, that he is a much younger man than my double, for he said that he had been to school as a pupil of Colson’s. He too learnt quickly; and if there is any difference in the two worlds, it is a keener intelligence: they are more receptive, quicker to grasp essentials.*

*“There are necessarily certain differences in their methods of government, but these differences are not vital. In Neo men are taught the use of arms, and receive their guerdon of citizenship (which I presume is the vote) only on production of a certificate of proficiency. But in the main their lives run parallel with ours. The very character of their streets, their systems of transportation, even their prison system, are replicas of those on this earth. The main difference, of course, is that their one language is universal. I intend at a later date writing at greater length on the institutions of Neo, but for the moment it is necessary that I should set down particulars of the machines and apparatus employed by me in communicating with our neighbours...”*

Here followed twenty closely written pages of technical description. Tim folded the manuscript and looked around at the astonished faces. Stamford was the first to break the silence.

“Preposterous!” he spluttered. “Impossible! Absurd!... It’s a nightmare! Another world—good God!”

“I believe every word of it.” It was Sir Charles’s quiet voice that stilled the agitated lawyer. “Of course, that is the speck by the side of the corona! Not the world which poor Colson found, but the moon of that world.”

“But couldn’t it be visible at some time?”

Sir Charles shook his head. “Not if it followed the exact orbit of the earth and was placed directly opposite—that is to say, immediately on the other side of the sun. It might overlap at periods, but in the glare of the sun it would be impossible to see so tiny an object. No, there is every possibility that Colson’s story is stark truth.”

He took the manuscript from Tim’s hand and read rapidly through the technical description.

“With this,” he said, touching the paper, “we shall be able to get into communication with these people. If we only had the vocabulary!” he groaned.

“I am afraid you will never hear from Neo again, sir,” said Tim quietly, and told of that brief but poignant minute of conversation he had had before the cry of the dying servant, and the crash of broken instruments, had brought the voice to an abrupt end.

After the lawyer and the scientist had departed, he went with Elsie into the instrument room, and they gazed in silence upon the motionless apparatus.

“The link is broken,” he said at last; “it can never be forged again, unless a new Colson arrives on both earths.”

She slipped her arm in his.

“Aren’t you glad?” she asked softly. “Do you want to know what will happen tomorrow or the next day?”

He shivered. “No. I don’t think so. But I should like to know what will happen in a few years’ time, when I’m a little older and you’re a little older.”

“Perhaps we’ll find a new world of our own,” said Elsie.

THE END

NEXT WEEK: BURN, WITCH, BURN! by A Merrit

[Return to Contents](#)

## POLARIS OF THE SNOWS by Charles B Stilson

### 5. Battle on the Floe

Helpless, Polaris stood at the brink of the rift, swirling water and tossing ice throwing the spray about him in clouds. Here was opposition against which his naked strength was useless. As if they realized that they were being parted from the firm land, the dogs grouped at the edge of the floe and sent their dismal howls across the raging swirl, only to be drowned by the din of the crashing icebergs.

Turning, Polaris saw Rose Emer. She stood at the doorway of the tent of skins, staring across the wind swept channel with a blank despair looking from her eyes.

“Ah, all is lost, now!” she gasped.

Then the great spirit of the man rose into spoken words. “No, lady,” he called, his voice rising clearly above the shrieking and thundering pandemonium. “We yet have our lives.”

As he spoke there was a rending sound at his feet. The dogs sprang back in terror and huddled against the face of the ice cliff. Torn away by the impact of some weightier body beneath, nearly half of the ledge where they stood was split from the main body of the floe, and plunged, heaving and crackling into the current.

Polaris saved himself by a mighty spring. Right in the path of the gash lay the sledge, and it hung balanced at the edge of the ice floe. Down it swung, and would have slipped over, but Polaris saw it going.

He clutched at the ends of the leathern dog harness as they glided from him across the ice, and, with a tug, into which he put all the power of his splendid muscles, he retrieved the sledge. Hardly had he dragged it to safety when, with another roar of sundered ice, their foothold gaped again and left them but a scanty shelf at the foot of the beetling berg.

“Here we may not stay, lady,” said Polaris. He swept the tent and its robes into his arms and piled them on the sledge. Without waiting to harness the dogs, he grasped the leather bands and alone pulled the load along the ledge and around a shoulder of the cliff.

At the other side of the cliff a ridge extended between the berg which they skirted and another towering mountain of ice of similar formation. Beyond the twin bergs lay the level plane of the floe, its edges continually frayed by the attack of the waves and the onset of floating ice.

Along the incline of the ridge were several hollows partially filled with drift snow. Knowing that on the ice cape, in such a tempest, they must soon perish miserably, Polaris made camp in one of these depressions where the deep snow tempered the chill of its foundation.

In the clutch of the churning waters the floe turned slowly like an immense wheel as it drifted in the current. Its course was away from the shore to the southwest, and it gathered speed and momentum with every passing second. The cove from whence it had been torn was already a mere notch in the faraway shore line.



Around them was a scene of wild and compelling beauty. Leagues and leagues of on rushing water hurled its white crested squadrons against the precipitous sides of the flotilla of icebergs, tore at the edges of the drifting floes, and threw itself in huge waves across the more level planes, inundating them repeatedly. Clouds of lacelike spray hung in the air after each attack, and cascading torrents returned to the waves.

Above it all the Antarctic sun shone gloriously, splintering its golden spears on the myriad pinnacles, minarets, battlements, and crags of towering masses of crystal that reflected back into the quivering air all the colours of the spectrum. Thinner crests blazed flame red in the rays. Other points glittered coldly blue. From a thousand lesser scintillating spires the shifting play of the colours, from vermilion to purple, from green to gold, in the lavish magnificence of nature's magic, was torture to the eye that beheld.

On the spine of the ridge stood Polaris, leaning on his long spear and gazing with heightened colour and gleaming eyes on those fairy symbols of old mother nature. To the girl who watched him he seemed to complete the picture. In his superb trappings of furs, and surrounded by his shaggy servants, he was at one with his weird and terrible surroundings. She admired—and shuddered.

Presently, when he came down from the ridge, she asked him, with a brave smile, “What, sir, will be the next move?”

“That is in the hands of the great God, if such a one there be,” he said. “Whatever it may be, it shall find us ready. Somewhere we must come to shore. When we do—on to the north and the ship, be it half a world away.”

“But for food and warmth? We must have those, if we are to go in the flesh.”

“Already they are provided for,” he replied quickly. He was peering sharply over her shoulder toward the mass of the other berg. With his words the clustered pack set up an angry snarling and baying. She followed his glance and paled.

Lumbering forth from a narrow pass at the extremity of the ridge was a gigantic polar bear. His little eyes glittered wickedly, hungrily, and his long, red tongue crept out and licked his slavering chops. As he came on, with ungainly, padding gait, his head swung ponderously to and fro.

Scarcely had he cleared the pass of his immense bulk when another twitching white muzzle was protruded, and a second beast, in size nearly equal to the first, set foot on the ridge and ambled on to the attack.

Reckless at least of this peril, the dogs would have leaped forward to close with the invaders but their master intervened. The stinging, cracking lash in his hand drove them from the foe. Their overlord, man, elected to make the battle alone.

In two springs he reached the sledge, tore the rifle from its coverings, and was at the side of the girl. He thrust the weapon into her hands.

“Back, lady; back to the sledge!” he cried. “Unless I call, shoot not. If you do shoot, aim for the throat when they rear, and leave the rest to me and the dogs. Many times have I met these enemies, and I know well how to deal with them.”

With another crack of the whip over the heads of the snarling pack, he left her and bounded forward, spear in hand and long knife bared.

Awkward of pace and unhurried, the snow kings came on to their feast. In a thought the man chose his ground. Between him and the bears the ridge narrowed so that for a few feet there was footway for but one of the monsters at once.

Polaris ran to where that narrow path began and threw himself on his face on the ice.

At that ruse the foremost bear hesitated. He reared and brushed his muzzle with his formidable crescent clawed paw. Polaris might have shot then and ended at once the hardest part of his battle. But the man held to a stubborn pride in his own weapons. Both of the beasts he would slay, if he might, as he always had slain. His guns were reserved for dire extremity.

The bear settled to all fours again, and reached out a cautious paw and felt along the path, its claws gouging seams in the ice. Assured that the footing would hold, it crept out on the narrow way, nearer and nearer to the motionless man. Scarce a yard from him it squatted. The steam of its breath beat toward him.

It raised one armed paw to strike. The girl cried out in terror and raised the rifle. The man moved, and she hesitated.

Down came the terrible paw, its curved claws projected and compressed for the blow. It struck only the adamantine ice of the pathway, splintering it. With the down stroke timed to the second, the man had leaped up and forward.

As though set on a steel spring, he vaulted into the air, above the clashing talons and gnashing jaws, and landed light and sure on the back of his ponderous adversary. To pass an arm under the bear’s throat, to clip its back with the grip of his legs was the work of a heart beat’s time for Polaris.

With a stifled howl of rage the bear rose to its haunches, and the man rose with it. He gave it no time to turn or settle. Exerting his muscles of steel, he tugged the huge head back. He swung clear from the body of his foe. His feet touched the path and held it. He shot one knee into the back of the bear.

The spear he had dropped when he sprang, but his long knife gleamed in his hand, and he stabbed, once, twice, sending the blade home under the brute’s shoulder. He released his grip; spurned the yielding body with his foot, and the huge hulk rolled from the path down the slope, crimsoning the snow with its blood.

Polaris bounded across the narrow ledge and regained his spear. He smiled as there arose from the foot of the slope a hideous clamour that told him that the pack had charged in, as usual, not to be restrained at sight of the kill. He waved his hand to the girl, who stood, statuelike, beside the sledge.

Doubly enraged at its inability to participate in the battle which had been the death of its mate, the smaller bear waited no longer when the path was clear, but rushed madly with lowered head. Strong as he was, the man knew that he could not hope to stay or turn that avalanche of flesh and sinew. As it reached him he sprang aside where the path broadened, lashing out with his keen edged spear.

His aim was true. Just over one of the small eyes the point of the spear bit deep, and blood followed it. With tigerish agility the man leaped over the beast, striking down as he did so.

The bear reared on its hindquarters and whimpered, brushing at its eyes with its forepaws. Its head gashed so that the flowing blood blinded it, it was beaten. Before it stood its master. Bending back until his body arched like a drawn bow, Polaris poised his spear and thrust home at the broad chest.

A death howl that was echoed back from the crashing cliffs was answer to his stroke. The bear settled forward and sprawled in the snow.

Polaris set his foot on the body of the fallen monster and gazed down at the girl with smiling face.

“Here, lady, are food and warmth for many days,” he called.

CONTINUES NEXT WEEK

[Return to Contents](#)