

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

WEBZINE

VOL. 15, ISSUE 14
6TH OCTOBER 2019

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HANSWORTH

BY KEVIN
REES—
A PITIFUL
WAIL...

DARK EXPOSURE

BY GK MURPHY
—YOU CANNOT
KILL WHAT YOU
CANNOT SEE...

INTERSTELLAR
BY LOUIS
KASATKIN

INTRODUCING
'BURN, WITCH, BURN'
BY A. MERRITT

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SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

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Carlton Herzog, Rex Mundy, A Merritt, Charles B Stilson*

SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

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

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

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

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This Edition

This week's cover illustration is *Witch Burning* by Harald Matern from Pixabay. Graphic design © by Gavin Chappell, logo design © by C Priest Brumley.

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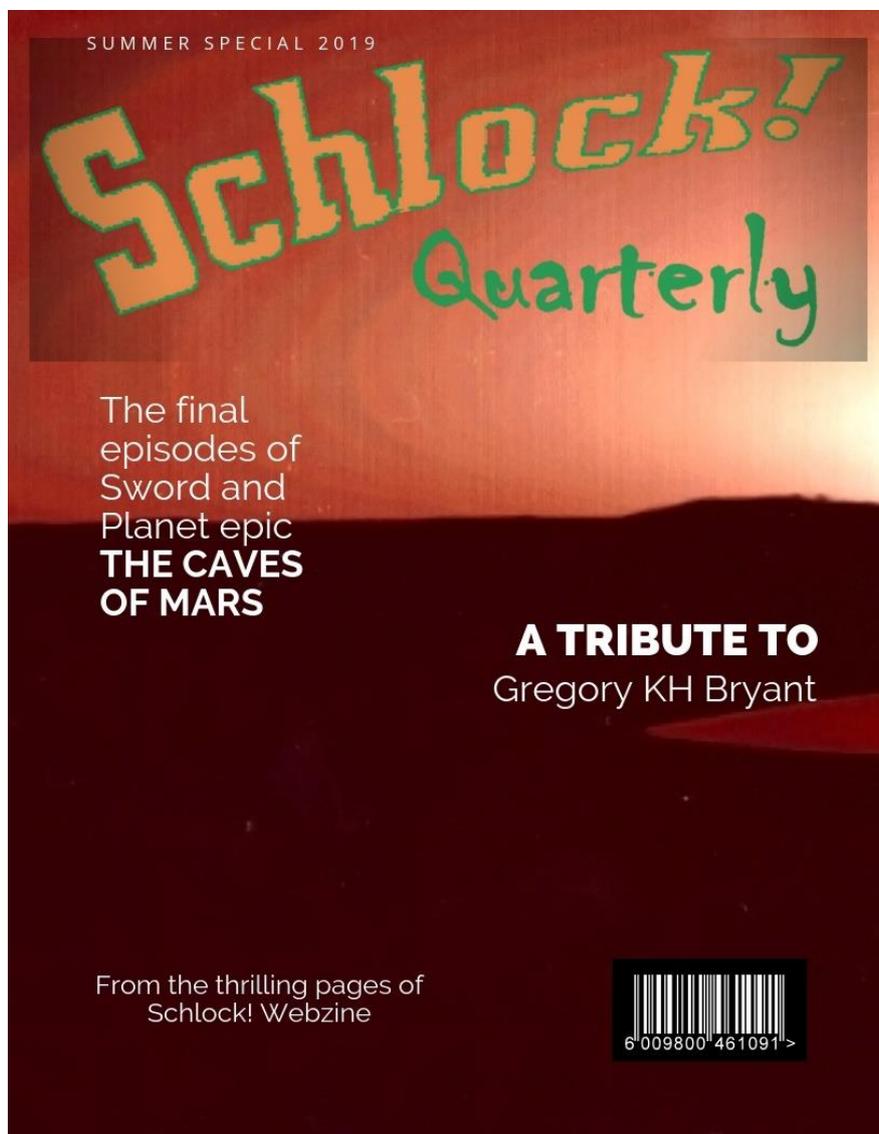
EDITORIAL

This week, a letter from Borneo leads to arachnophobic horror. The man of destiny rides into the future. And Marko chooses the witching hour to desecrate a graveyard. We also have science fiction poetry from Louis Kasatkin and double, triple, quadruple trouble from Carlton Herzog.

Two Edwardian renegades return to civilisation to meet an unexpected welcome. A. Merritt's witchcraft classic *Burn, Witch, Burn*, begins with an unknown death. Meanwhile Polaris and Rose Emer set off into Arctic peril.

—Gavin Chappell

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



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IT CAME FROM INSIDE THE INKWELL!

IT CAME FROM INSIDE THE INKWELL!

By Vincent Davis



"INSTEAD OF DISMISSING WHAT HELEN IS SAYING, I WANT YOU TO EXPLORE WHY DEFECATING ON THAT FAMILY'S PICNIC MIGHT BE UPSETTING TO HER."

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>

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There didn't appear to be a catch. Maybe that was the catch? A too good to be true rent within commuter distance to the centre of London, and with a view overlooking a park. Granted, the house looked old and tired, but the windows were intact and the door was the solid, old type she had seen in the period detective shows she liked to watch.

"Well, Miss Faith?"

"Fath; not Faith."

The estate agent shrugged and held the keys out like some sacrificial offering. He smiled the practiced smile he probably perfected in a mirror to cover his boredom.

"I need to look inside first. And I may have questions." Jessie noticed a momentary twitch of annoyance curl the corners of his mouth. "You can't expect me to take it before I've seen it."

"Of course. Let me show you around." The smile had returned but the twitch grew more pronounced and threatened to stretch out his lips into a grimace. Jessie glanced at the keys that had started to rattle in the young man's hand. "Hey, why don't I give you these," he offered the bunch again, "and you can take a look around without me hovering over your shoulder."

Jessie took the keys and walked up to the door. The lock looked new and contrasted starkly with the faded lustre of the paint. She took the shiniest key and inserted it. The door opened easily with no creepy wail to greet her. Jessie stepped in to the hallway. Given the house looked uncared for from the outside it was remarkably fresh inside. Instead of the magnolia she had seen in every other property she had visited this one was a pleasant blend of paint and modern wallpaper. She put down her bag and noticed a few envelopes on the floor. The previous occupants she guessed. She put them on a small table and went inside.

"There has to be a catch," she whispered to herself. Five hundred pounds a month for a detached three-bedroom house with a cellar and converted attic. She found the kitchen and was again surprised by the modern units and smart cooker. And there was even an island with a small sink. She turned on the taps and found the water was crystal clear. The window next to the sink showed her a nicely kept garden with a small stone building at the end.

"Living room and bedrooms next."

All were perfect, even the decoration suited her taste.

"Made a decision?"

"Jesus!"

"Sorry, I shouldn't have done that." The agent stood on the step outside. He looked even more nervous Jessie noticed. His eyes darted and squinted over her shoulder as she stood in the doorway of the lounge.

"Are you going to tell me what the catch is?"

“I’m not sure I’m following,” he said, earnestly.

“Come on. I’ve been looking for a place for ages and I’ve not come across a bargain like this. Five hundred a month and I get all this. No catches or restrictions. What about pets?”

“You have pets?”

“Yeah, a cat. Vesper comes with me or I say no.” Jessie watched him. He licked his lips and tried on his smile, which slid off his face like it was skating on oil.

“The owner isn’t partial to animals.” Jessie crossed her arms and stared at him. “Give me a second.” He walked back towards his car and took out his phone. Jessie couldn’t hear the conversation, but the agent’s arms expressed enough to say he was arguing the toss. He nodded several times and ended the phone call. He walked back up the path with his smile fixed again.

“Okay, my office phoned the owner. They said if you are prepared to pay an extra twenty quid to cover any damage then the place is yours.”

“I’ll take it.”

A week later and after several trips to her parents place to collect her belongings, Jessie could finally call the place her own. Vesper had not taken well to the house and spent most of her time clawing to get back into her cat box, which was unusual as she hated being enclosed.

“Yes, mother, I’m fine. Come around in a couple of weeks. I’ll have everything in place. Vesper is being a pain... don’t know. Maybe it’s because it’s such a big place and she’s overwhelmed. Listen, I’m going to order a pizza. I’ll call you soon. Love to dad.”

Jessie wandered into the kitchen and switched on the lights. She noticed Vesper hadn’t eaten again. The water bowl was nearly empty, but her dried food was still full to the edge.

“Come on, Vesp, you little horror.” Jessie moved the bowls to the end of the island hoping the change would encourage the cat to search for her food.

Vesper slunk back into the cat box. Jessie returned to the sink and turned on the hot tap. She dangled her fingers under the flow, which wasn’t getting any hotter for the long shower she had promised herself.

“Shit!”

She reached for the pack the agent had left and found the single A4 sheet explaining the workings of the boiler. It was down in the cellar, a place she hadn’t looked at when she viewed the place.

“Torch, do I have a torch? Ah, phone.”

Jessie switched on her phone and chose the flashlight. She approached the door of the cellar and found it locked. Frowning, she tried to remember where she put the bunch of keys the estate agent had given her.

“Table.”

The small table in the hallway still had the two letters she had put there. On top were the keys. As she picked them up, Jessie glanced down at the letters. The first one was an ad for a credit card. The other one was more intriguing. It was in an overseas envelope with a blue and red stripe running around its edge—the first one she had ever seen. She squinted to read the postmark; Borneo. Now curious, she took the keys and envelope into the lounge and dropped down on to the sofa.

Flipping the envelope over, Jessie saw there was several ink stamps that read in block letters, DELAYED from countries the letter had passed through. The address on the front was hers all right. Above that was a name, Adele Atkins. Jessie wondered who she was and where she was now. She peered closely at the postmark again. The date was too small to read.

“Can’t make you out.” She reached for her phone and switched off the torch. She changed to the camera setting and zoomed onto the postmark. The date read a year ago. Jessie frowned. The estate agent told her it had only been vacant for a couple of months. Even with the delays, why would a year old letter be lying on the floor?

“Liar,” she said absently. He must have lied. But the property didn’t smell or look like it had been vacant for very long. It felt more like someone had only recently moved out. It was scrupulously clean—no left tissues or rubbish in the bins, and no stains anywhere. As she lay on her sofa and pondered a high-pitched wail came from the kitchen.

“Vesp!”

Jessie ran to the kitchen. At first she couldn’t see the cat and looked around frantically until a soft meow came from behind the kitchen curtain.

“Christ, Vesper you gave your mum a fright.” She reached out to pick up the cat. “Fuck!” Vesper hissed angrily. Jessie watched blood ooze from four straight cuts running the length of her hand. “Jesus, Vesp! Why did you do that?” She switched on the tap and put her hand underneath. “Ahh!” Through the steam of scalding water she saw she had turned on the hot tap. “You were bloody cold before!” she shouted at the tap and flipped it off before turning on the cold tap. The frigid water immediately soothed her bloodied and scalded hand. As she watched Vesp press herself tightly to the wall, something moved in the corner of her eye near to the end of the island. Jessie froze, the tap gushed water over her hand but her attention was on the reflection in the dark window that showed the view over her shoulder. Jessie watched in horror as a thick, hairy leg delicately probed the dried cat food. The island obscured whatever was attached to the hideous limb. She could hear the small nuggets shifting in the bowl like they were being stirred. With some effort she dragged her eyes to a box sitting on the worktop. Inside were her sharpest kitchen knives. She glanced in the black window again. There was nothing. The limb had disappeared.

Slowly she brought up her other hand and turned off the water. As soon as the numbing cold left her skin the hot throb of the scratch came back. Jessie ignored it and spun around. Several of the nuggets lay on the floor around the bowl. She inched her hand across to the box but kept her gaze on the food bowl. Dangling her hand blindly inside, she began feeling for the handles. As her fingers probed deeper something hairy ran over them.

“Arghh!” She pulled her hand back. Terror took hold of her body and she ran out of the kitchen. Something impossibly big scuttled menacingly from behind the island. Jessie didn’t turn around to see what it was. She ran into the lounge and slammed the door then frantically wedged a chair tightly against it. Backing away she collided with the sofa and fell back. The envelope from Borneo fluttered off the arm and landed on the floor. Her breath came in huge gasps and she was close to tears. Jessie pulled the cushions around her, aware they wouldn’t provide any protection, but they helped bring some control back to her. As she cowered, Jessie heard a pitiful wail coming from the kitchen again. This time it stopped abruptly.

“Vesp?” she cried softly.

Something scuttled past the lounge door and stopped outside as if it was listening for sounds coming from the room. Jessie held her breath.

The ringtone of her phone boomed in the silence causing Jessie to let out a scream. She snatched up the device and stabbed at the screen.

“Hi, I’m Jason. Would you be interested in PPI...?”

“Help me, get someone get the...”

“Hello, can you tell me your name then we can discuss your cl...”

“Fuck you. Get the police. My cat is dead and something is outside the room.”

“I’m sorry but we operate a zero tolerance policy...”

Jessie cut him off and dialled 999.

“Police...Quickly there’s something in my house.” The few seconds she had to wait to be connected felt like forever.

“Police...what assistance do you need, caller?”

“There’s something is in my house,” Jessie screamed into the phone.

“Are you saying intruders have broken in?”

“Just send someone!” Jessie screamed again at the screen. “Please, send someone.”

“What’s your address?”

“136 Hansworth Road.”

Jessie sensed the long pause before the operator came back.

“Can you confirm 136 Hansworth Road?”

“Yes, please hurry.”

“Lock yourself in a room and I’ll send a patrol to you.”

“Thank you.” Jessie let the phone slip out of her hand and watched it land on the envelope from Borneo. She reached down to pick it up all the while listening. For now, whatever was outside seemed to have gone away. Secretly she knew that wasn’t true. Slowly, she tore open the flimsy envelope and pulled out two blue sheets of handwritten pages. She scanned the letter quickly and felt sick as she read it.

*Base 230
Tara Forest*

Dearest Adele,

I miss you so much. This damned jungle is taking everything from me and I don’t know how much more I can take.

Peterson swore he is taking all the credit for our current discoveries and research when we get back to civilisation. He even implied I might not make it out unless I agree. He always was a glory hound. If you can detect, I used a past tense.

But first my darling, I must tell you. Something terrifyingly glorious has happened amid my despair. The Iwaga tribe has taken me as one of theirs and shared secrets, such incredible secrets. I feel so privileged. They took me to a cave that could never have been detected by foot or air. Inside, they showed me their god. I was so scared, Adele. I’ve worked with spiders for as long as I can remember, but this experience has made me question everything. I’d heard myths and stories of the supposed giant spiders carrying off humans, and I knew it was an impossibility. That was until now.

Oh, my love, you must do something important for me. This letter will arrive first. Following it will be a separate package. You see, I stole three of the wretched creatures. I’ve protected them and made sure they have enough to eat for the journey. I’ve written instructions on the box containing them. Be brave, my sweet. You must only open the box in the cellar and feed them meat immediately as they will be voraciously hungry and will attack and eat the first flesh they find. Carry this routine out daily until I get back to study them. Please do this for me, my sweet Adele.

The Iwaga call them Ghost Spiders. They believe they can materialise out of thin air. I saw the Queen; she was the size of a cow.

I told the Chief, Peterson was going to bring more people into the jungle and tear it apart. Their medicine man spoke with the Spider Queen and several of the spiders found Peterson alone in his tent. Next morning I only saw a clean picked skeleton.

The spiders I'm sending you will still be infants by the time I get back and won't possess any dark powers. They cannot materialise in the room. I promise.

I'll return by autumn.

I can't wait to see you again.

John

XXX

Jessie let the pages slip out of her fingers the moment she heard scuttling behind her head. The same probing leg she saw in the kitchen ran through her red hair as if toying with it. With all the movement she possessed throughout her life deserting her, Jessie could only flick her eyes up to the ceiling where a huge black and orange striped body with eight hairy legs attached to it was materialising on the ceiling. Jessie shook with terror as a scream that could not save her was forever locked in her throat. The huge spider remained motionless for a second. It set its eyes on her as it did with all its prey.

When it was satisfied there would be no struggle, the Ghost Spider let go of the plaster and, with its legs outstretched and fangs dripping, dropped through the silent air.

THE END

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THE CASTLE OUROBOROS by Rob Bliss

Epilogue

I am a ghost now. Allowed to perceive all perspectives from my ethereal eyrie hovering over the castle, over the nation itself. To see the lives of the living and their fates, but only to a limited scope into the future.

I saw Friedrich and Cybele rush from the small door in the north turret cloaked by a small hedge of tangled bushes. They rushed for the stables and each rode a galloping steed down the mountain road in the rain and mist. Herr Hitler followed shortly after, slipping through the small door, ignoring the blood seeping from his wound, hearing the snorting of the horses and the hooves on the cobblestones. He followed the sound and found the stables, leapt on the back of the third horse and stormed away from the castle, vanished into time and the future, to await his destiny.

Flames leapt through windows, tongues of fire reaching high, spinning their columns of black smoke into the dark storm clouds. In every room corpses burned, their white sheets turning to filaments of smoke as fire ate their fibres. Smoke filled every hallway, heat melted painted faces, blackened suits of armour, eroded the weapons on the walls of my forebears. The burning air burst through locked doors, erupted in the stairwell, devoured the ancient wood of the staircase, and found robed bodies dropped by asphyxiation in the antechamber before the dungeon. Mercifully, I suppose, every member of the cabal had choked to death on the thick, lung-burning smoke that filled every corner—no secret passage sealed from its worming fog—from the castle's great heights to its lowest depths.

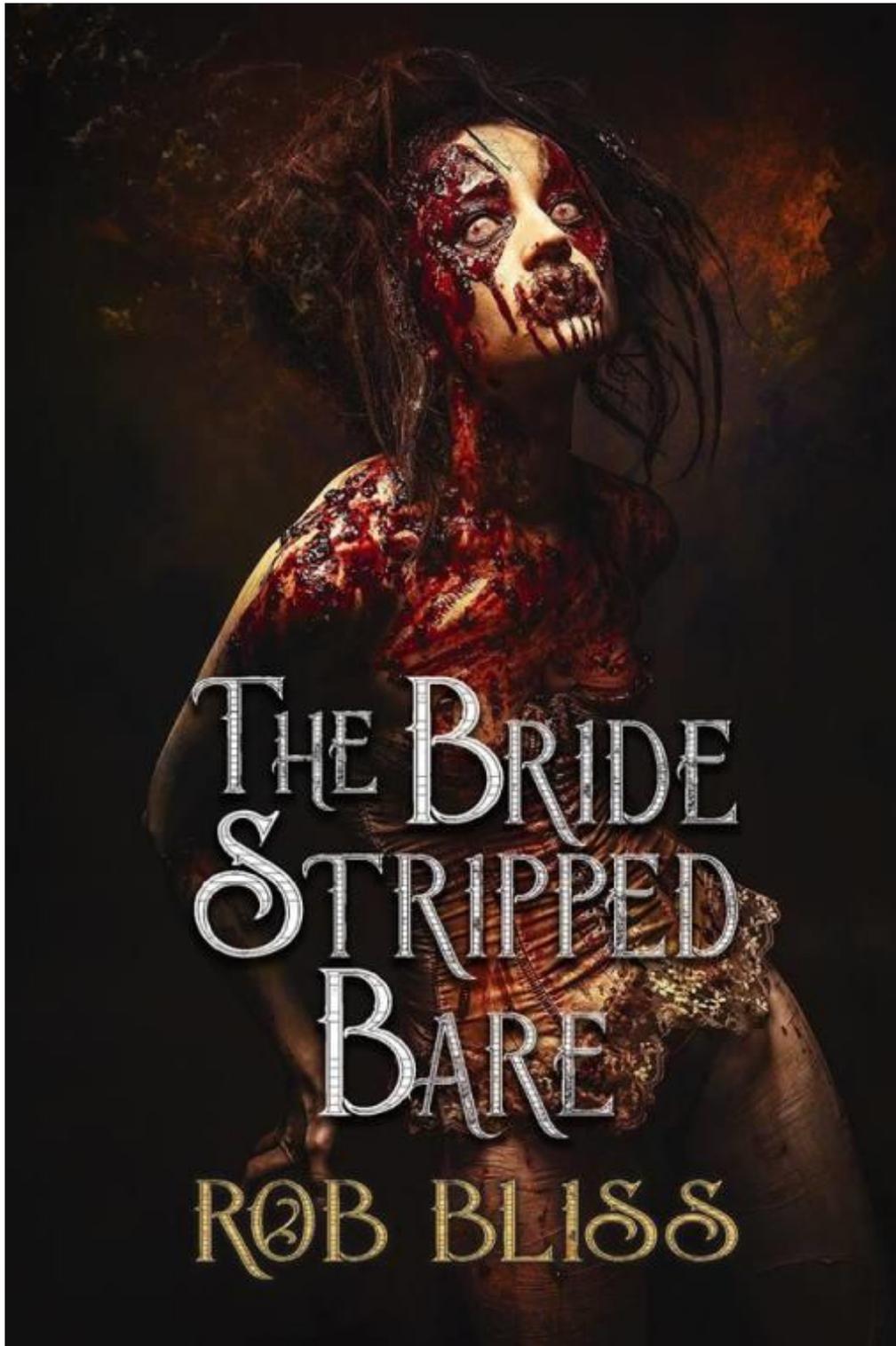
The stone walls stood as they unleashed their flame and smog from windows and doors, and all was observed in the town below. At morning sunlight, the townspeople rode up the mountain path to see the shell of stone that was once my family estate, to watch the last small fires burn on. Some of them wept, but many more promised themselves a toast from their finest bottles of wine when they returned to their insignificant hovels.

My punishment—or reward—whatever it may become as time eats away at the events of human history, is to observe the actions of my nation, of my Teutonic race, of the changes soon to come. My hope is that Herr Hitler will still rise to enact the prophecies he portends, that some other benefactor will take him under his wing, or that his will remain strong enough to follow his destiny and take power when and where he can. As I guided him.

I see wars and rumours of wars, but I do not see their conclusions. I see the boy escape many attempts on his life, and emerge unscathed. I hope he will continue on, to forge his—and my—future. He is a blessed man.

I am mist, without body, but with a soul that lingers. I watch, and nothing escapes my vision.

THE END



Available from Necro Publications.

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DARK EXPOSURE by GK Murphy

Marko was pissed off. Not just minutely pissed off—majorly, massively pissed off—because tonight of all nights, on this weekend (albeit on a Sunday night, when some might say the weekend was done), he'd gotten into an argument with his boyfriend of seven years, which resulted in a facial slap, some petty spitting, some foot stomping, when Marko called Jonny Lee a “poisoned queen” and stormed out the house in the middle of the night, mostly because the chubby tart had refused to accompany him to the town graveyard and assist him in digging up a corpse, where afterwards Marko planned on defecating in the empty burial plot—just for a laugh—just for a giggle—for something to do, for the hell of it, simply because Marko and Jonny loved doing things like that.

As Marko sat in the centre of the mist-laden burial ground in the middle of town tonight, he looked at his mobile and saw it was five-past-midnight. He chuckled and said, “The Witching Hour...” and then commenced to pull down his jeans. The 19 year old vandal squatted and tensed in order to push with all his might and power to squeeze out a couple of good solid quarter pound lumps of excrement—two oily tankers that, once through and out the tunnel, were destined never to return—this depraved and uncouth act, otherwise known as dropping the kids off at the pool.

There was a patch of dock leaves nearby so he reached across for a handful to clean his soiled arse. Being night and pretty dark in this vicinity of town, so far from any road, he was careful the dock leaves were not mistaken for nettles—which would have been bad, even probably worse than a “heavy wrinkle Durex”, which he and Jonny had tried and suffered for, if only because Jonny wanted to try something wholly different!

Pulling up his jeans, Marko thought he heard something perhaps mere feet from where he was located, as he stood there petulantly and proud by a humungous headstone made of sandstone. Tonight, this headstone may have been exactly the singular one in the entire graveyard which may have proven a bad idea to vandalize, having shit on the grave it headed.

In all seriousness, he frowned heavily and spluttered, “Who’s there? I warn you, I’m a master of martial arts. I’m good at Judo, Karate AND Origami....so show yourself at your own peril. I’ll single-handedly whip your bitch arse!”

Silence....

“I know you’re hiding in those bushes, moron...” Marko said indignantly, “...if you’re man enough, come out and fight me, unless you’re up for having a bit of fun?”

More silence...

Suddenly, a deep yet low, throaty and somewhat guttural cackle issued from the fog and grey atmosphere, directly from the air surrounding young Marko that emanated directly from the darkness itself. In itself, the mirthless laughter was an entity all of its own and it was devoid of shape or form. It seemed to just infiltrate from nowhere, unless, one might say, it was almost as if the elongated boom portrayed a role which acted as the disgusted and angered disembodied soul or voice of the once very serene graveyard itself.

The graveyard was upset. It had been offended. And justice had to be meted out.

After all, this consecrated ground was a place of rest for the dead and this space alone deserved respect from the living in the community. These corpses (whilst alive, of course) once occupied, lived and loved in, played and frolicked in this community.

“I come here in the spirit of peace, as I’m sure you do...” Marko said, “...I’m so sorry if my shitting on your grave affected your sense of being, or your better judgement. Of course, I’m quite young and good-looking and virile, and I’m still in my teens in fact, and if you’re up for one good solid and stiff shag, well, guess what, hombre—so am I. So, if you want to show yourself, come on out of this unseemly fog and let’s begin to get it on!”

The voice boomed, “You little queer!”

Marko’s eyes widened and he omitted a girlish squeak—a poor excuse for a scream.

He spluttered as he backed up against the sandstone headstone. He said, “I’m only being friendly, there’s no need for that!”

“I wouldn’t touch your faggot rectum even with my own dead and deformed, shrivelled cock...” the voice issued, followed by more the din of more elongated cackling. This proved a sound which served to send the fear of God through the teenager.

The voice was distinctly American. The very usage of the word “faggot” was a giveaway. It was a remark they used frequently across the Atlantic when describing gay folks.

“You American...?” Marko enquired.

“Sure am, kid.”

“Are you some kind of American fucking ghost?”

“Fuck you, boy, don’t dare try and humour me, I’ll take great pleasure and tear your fucking head off and piss down your fucking neck, you fucking little gay boy!”

Marko said, “But you sound kind of cute. I love American guys. They’re sexy and hot as hell. I always wanted to visit the States...just as much as I’d like to go to Russia and China!”

“Russians and Chinese folks don’t like queers, either!”

“How do you know?” Marko protested, “I mean, being gay is universal, you find guys like me wherever you go in the world, whatever country, town or city or village, in every bar and club, in every shopping store or bank...gay people are everywhere, and the gay population is vastly expanding throughout the western hemisphere, wherever you go, we’re there...all blue, pink, gold and shiny, ready to shower you with hugs and kisses!”

Silence ensued...

But the spirit had something to say.

It was more of a growl.

“I don’t like queers that shit on my grave!”

Marko Manson smiled slyly, licking his lips as did so. His eyes glistened with a spark of menace and untold deception.

He said with a low mysterious chuckle, “Don’t you know who I am, Mr Allen, or my true reasons behind my appearance here tonight?”

No answer...

Marko continued, “Do you remember Dorothy and Richard Manson, the two people whose car your own car collided with on a Wolverhampton bypass during the holiday period two years ago, who died in the crash along with yourself...mainly due to your belly full of cocaine and alcohol? To my understanding, you were a struggling thriller author who relocated to the UK due to the fact you found meagre success in your homeland, the USA? So—you thought you’d give us a try. Of course, this was bad judgement as you achieved mostly nothing at all over here in the British Isles, mainly because as a writer you were utterly unimaginative and talentless. Yes, you ought to have remained in the States and played the waiting game, shouldn’t you, Mr Seymour Allen? Really, do you realize how easy it was for me to find your burial plot?”

The invisible entity growled, “I’ll see you suffer for disturbing my peace!”

“As an author of thrillers, Mr Allen, you must have a small inkling of how sorcery or witchcraft works? Simply put, those who are damned sell their souls to the Devil—like I did when I understood that you killed them. In my particular case I, believed that justice had to be done for the death of my parents’ in that crash...when simply it all boiled down to revoking that heavenly passport of the soul in order to exact a grisly revenge.”

“You cannot kill what you cannot see,” the ghost hissed.

Good quote...

Suddenly, Marko reached his arms out into the atmosphere. His eyes turned from blue to twin neon red flares as they burned like two intense pinpoints. As this strange enactment happened, the ground began to vibrate and shake, whilst simultaneously the mist in the air began to swirl overhead as it started to quicken in its movement. It formed an irregular tunnel which took shape in the growing jet-stream, a bizarre twister in the skies above the graveyard. Here, a tortured murmur issued from the transforming teen’s mouth, in between groans of agonized pain as blood issued from his eye-sockets and began to spurt in wide arcs into the unseemly grey fog which swallowed the blood and bile spray hungrily.

“Come to me, Mr Allen, you homophobic, bigoted cunt!” were the words, and final words, that infiltrated the dark, from the mouth of Marko Manson.

Doors opened in Marko’s chest, bursting from between his ribcage as they opened up to beckon the hiding American spirit somewhere in the ether, in order to suck it in, to swallow it up and deliver unto damnation for crimes on Earth.

Marko was no longer human. He was a huge metal box, its doors beckoning.

A man of perhaps sixty years old stood there in his burial smock. It had, by now, greyed and became moth and ground-worn, as had indeed the ghostly American's palled and skeletal face and crude body. Maggots oozed and dribbled as they battled through parchment-like flesh on their journeys into the atmosphere after a long time underground, as they fell from the riddled corpse's sunken eyes and misshapen nasal passages, as he attempted to speak yet discovered words were never forthcoming.

He was drawn towards the metallic box sat atop of his grave.

In one stream of green and red neon, Seymour Allen folded and submitted to the unseen forces as his living (or dead, in this case) form shifted and twisted, until it was part nothingness, part shuffling body, as it entered into the swirling ether itself. He had completely succumbed to forgo his once straight and tall human form since now he had transformed into something more special and spiritual. As this sparse being spiralled through the atmosphere, a single elongated scream echoed throughout the night and pierced the darkness, when once inside the box, the door shut with a loud click of a metallic slam. All at once, the American author was delivered unto Hell and its furnaces.

The box faded and vanished.

"Marko, are you around here somewhere?" came a voice, which belonged to Marko's boyfriend Jonny Lee. "What's all the bloody stupid noise you're making?"

Suddenly, Marko Manson appeared from behind a bush nearby in a secluded corner of the graveyard. He was smiling, since he was glad to see his loved one. "Where the hell have you been?" he said with a knowing grin, "I've been here an hour waiting for you to show up!"

Jonny Lee said, "Listen, I bought us a bottle of whiskey to share...the strong American kind."

Marko reached out and pulled Jonny Lee closer to embrace him in a loving bear hug. Close together, he giggled through tears of joy and contentment as he whispered into Jonny's left ear, "American...yes, my favourite."

THE END

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INTERSTELLAR by Louis Kasatkin

*Standing in our stockinged feet
on the surface of an alien world,
wondering whether we can ever go back
go back go back again to that
place where we started from?
So very far away so very
long ago that somehow we left
somehow found ourselves in our
stockinged feet standing and staring
staring across an unfamiliar horizon
wrought of jewels burnished with gold,
dazzling and shining and when
all is done and all is told
we simply stand with one question
remaining on our lips,
How do we get back home?*

THE END

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THE TIMMIES by Carlton Herzog

Little Timmy Made-Well had a sunken face and skeletal body. Were it not for the fact that he moved and breathed you'd swear that he was dead.

He had no friends. He had no hobbies. He did poorly in school. All his energy went into avoiding his numerous tormentors on the school-yard, and at home. His mean-spirited sister Peppercorn Polly tortured him daily. Once she pushed him into a well on her way to burn down the old mill.

Timmy's plight did not go unnoticed. One day his uncle Buck asked, "Why are you always so blue?" Timmy told him "I have no friends, and everybody picks on me!" Uncle Buck said "I can show you how to make friends. Would you like that?" Timmy nodded.

"Come with me down to the river," Uncle Buck said. Together they walked down to the river. As they stood on the bank, Uncle Buck said, "Pay close attention." He bent over and scooped up a handful of red-clay. "This here is what's called 'making clay'. It's what you use to make people."

Buck tossed the clay back on the ground. He passed his hands palm down over the clay. As he did, he recited a rhyme: Let my Timmy's sorrow end by giving him a little friend.

Within moments a figure rose from the clay. It was a little boy, one who looked just like Timmy. Buck said, "Touch his forehead with your finger and give him a name." Timmy did as he was told. He named the little boy Timmy Too.

Although Timmy Too looked and sounded like Timmy he was different in some ways. For one thing, he was strong where Timmy was weak, loud where Timmy was quiet, and bright where Timmy was dull.

Timmy Too did not take any guff from the other kids at school. As for Polly, he threw her in the well, and waited a few days before he told anybody she was down there.

At first, Timmy Too liked Timmy and felt protective of him. But after a while he grew bored with him. Since Timmy Too knew everything that Timmy knew, he went down to the river and made himself a friend. He named his creation Timmy Three. Timmy Three and Timmy Too were very much alike.

Timmy was surprised when he saw Timmy Three. And a bit jealous. After all, Timmy Too was his friend first. In Timmy's eyes, Timmy Three was a third wheel. Timmy Three felt the same way about Timmy.

Timmy Three thought about getting rid of Timmy. But he wasn't sure how Timmy Too would take it. He decided that he would just make more Timmys.

Timmy Three went down to the river and performed the making ritual. But he didn't stop with Timmy Four or even Timmy Five. He spent the whole morning and afternoon creating a battalion. Now there would be plenty of Timmys to go around for everybody.

When Timmy and Timmy Too saw the battalion of Timmys coming back from the river they were stunned. Timmy Too berated Timmy Three: “We’re already stretched thin in the explanation department what with there being three identical Timmys.”

He then pointed to the wave advancing toward them and said, “How are we going to explain them?”

Timmy Three laughed: “We don’t have to explain anything to anybody. There’s so many of us now no one would dare mess with us. And we can always make more.”

Timmy didn’t like what he was hearing. So, he went to Uncle Buck’s house and told him what had happened. Buck just sat there smoking his pipe. Then he said, “Come with me.” They both walked down to the river. They stood on the very spot where Timmy Too had been made. Buck turned to Timmy and said, “Sometimes good intentions aren’t enough when you make things. Sometimes you need to undo what you’ve done.” He started moving his hands up and down while chanting: What’s been made has gone to spoil; return it all to this here soil.

A few moments later, Timmy could see all the Timmys running toward them. He got scared. Buck saw the look on his face and said, “Stand your ground and watch.” When the Timmys reached the spot where the first Timmy had been made, they started diving into the clay and disappearing. Soon the only Timmy standing was Timmy. The rest had returned to the soil from whence they came.

Uncle Buck asked Timmy if he had learned anything from this experience. Timmy looked at him and said, “Two things: magic is more trouble than it’s worth.”

“And the other?” Buck asked.

“I’ll never listen to you again.” With that he turned and walked away.

THE END

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SOLDIERS OF MISFORTUNE by Rex Mundy

7. Farewell to the Valley

I gazed up at the encircling cliffs. Was this to be our fate, trapped in a prehistoric valley home to a dying civilisation while Herzog remained at liberty, working against the Legion as a one man fifth column?

Sula joined us, addressing Storey. He listened, then said, 'She says that this is not the only way out of the valley. A precipitous path crosses the cliffs and comes down near the other end. It's too narrow for camels, but if we hurry, we may reach the other end before the Touaregs make their way through the tunnel.'

Half an hour or more later, we reached the far side. Here a cliff rose high above the trickling thread of silver that was the stream. The path we had followed was a ledge winding down the side of the cliff, almost imperceptible. The wind buffeted at us, Storey, Sula and I. The rest of the Azzi had remained behind at Tioga's orders. But as we looked down from the cliff, we saw the first of a line of men on camelback issuing forth from the cave mouth.

'Too late,' I groaned. 'We're too late.'

'Never too late,' Storey snapped. He whipped his rifle up to his shoulder and fired off a blast. It was a long shot if ever there was one, but it was not unsuccessful, and one Touareg riding near Herzog fell with a scream from his camel.

'Damn it,' Storey cursed. 'I was aiming for Herzog.' He gave me a look. 'Help me, damn you.'

I raised my own rifle and fired. Sula took the remaining gun and made her own contribution. But we were too far away to do more than pick off a few, and more were riding out from the cave all the time. Herzog and a few more scattered across the plain. The rest were still coming out of the tunnel.

A thought seized me. I lowered my gun.

'This is futile,' I said. 'Speak with Sula. Ask her if she can use her powers to aid us.'

'What are you jabbering about, man?' Storey fired off another shot, but it vanished into the haze without hitting any of the distant foe. 'This telekinesis? It's absolute bosh, I told you.'

I seized his barrel and hauled it down. 'Speak to her,' I urged him as he looked angrily at me. 'Ask her if she can bring down the tunnel. Most of them are still inside. We can trap them in there and then Herzog's force will be reduced to the merest handful.'

Storey looked me up and down, then gazed down at the force of Touaregs riding out of the tunnel. Then he spoke to Sula.

She had ceased firing and was gazing expectantly at us. When Storey addressed her, she lowered her head. Nervously I gripped the stock of my rifle and waited, watching. She said

nothing, did nothing. After a moment, I said to Storey, 'What was her reaction? Did she say she would?'

'Fakery and superstition,' Storey said dismissively. 'A fool like you with your theosophy and your séances might fall for it, but...'

I felt a slight tremor from the sandstone beneath my feet. Worriedly I looked down. Was the cliff about to fall? Dust rose from the rocks. They were vibrating slightly. All at once, the sandstone face below us fell in a rattling cascade of rocks.

Rock dust rose in clouds as the cliff calved whole sections of its side, which cascaded crazily to the sandy earth. I saw one rock land right on top of a Touareg raider, squashing him and his camel as a small boy might squash a beetle. Now the rain of rocks was so thick I could see nothing more of the Touaregs. Still the ground shook beneath my feet. Clinging to the sandstone face beside me I watched open mouthed as the avalanche thundered on.

At last silence fell. The dust began to settle. When the clouds of grit cleared, they revealed a jumble of rocks blocking the entrance to the tunnel. A few mangled forms, Touareg or camel, lay among the rocks. Otherwise there was nothing.

A black shadow flew overhead. I looked up to see vultures circling high above. News travels fast at those altitudes. Slowly the birds circled lower.

I pictured the rest of the Touaregs pent up within the mountain. Both ends of the tunnel had now been cut off, the first by their own actions, the second by this unexpected avalanche. Unexpected? Or was it? I glanced at Sula speculatively.

'By all that's holy...' muttered Storey, looking in awe at the chaos of fallen sandstone. 'That's a lucky chance! But we're not in the clear yet.'

'What are you talking about?' I said, not looking away from Sula. The girl looked weary, weary to the bone. 'The whole murderous lot of them are trapped. They'll never dig their way out of there.' The air would be stifling. So many men and camels would use it up in no time. Unless some filtered in from the outside they might die of asphyxiation before starvation.

'The Touaregs are done for,' said Storey. 'Between the ones we shot and the ones so conveniently trapped in the tunnel, I shouldn't think many got away. But look!'

He pointed dramatically out across the rocky plain towards the desert sands beyond. Riding doggedly across them was a man in the uniform of a sergeant of the French Foreign Legion.

'Herzog!' I spat. 'He's getting away.'

I levelled my rifle and fired. But he was a long way out of range by now, and the bullet ricocheted off a rock hundreds of yards from his receding form.

'Don't waste your ammunition,' Storey said. 'We've got to get after him. We'll bring him to justice—or at least administer desert justice.' He patted the stock of his rifle. 'Come on!'

'How?' I said. 'Besides, what damage can he do, now his Touaregs are all dead?'

‘He can do plenty,’ Storey told me. ‘Remember, only we know that he is a traitor. If Commandant Le Boucher is not told, who knows how many other patrols he will lead to their doom? I told you, he’s working for the Prussians. They have interests in Morocco, which they hope to annexe. So does France, but if her desert legions are tied down by a wholesale revolt of the Touaregs, she will not be able to, and Germany will sweep in. Have you no understanding of how that will affect the balance of power?’

He halted, and pointed down at the plain of rocks beneath us. ‘As to how, several camels survived, those ridden by men we shot from up here.’ I saw the beasts trotting aimlessly amidst the desolation. ‘We must go down and catch three of them, then get after Herzog.’

I turned to Sula, who had been silent ever since the avalanche. Had she caused it with her telekinetic powers? Or had it happened by coincidence? As a believer in arcane matters, I would like to think that she brought about the vengeance of her people on the Touareg raiders. Storey would scoff. But something had left the Azzi girl quiet and subdued.

Storey spoke to her, no doubt repeating his words in Tamasheq. Her reaction surprised me. She drew back her head in negation and gestured back up the narrow path, speaking at length.

‘What’s she saying?’ I asked uneasily.

‘She must return to her people,’ Storey said. ‘She will take them the news of the defeat of the Touaregs, and they will begin to rebuild their civilisation. Now the tunnel is blocked, they will find it harder to get out of their valley, but they will be safe from outside attack.’

She reached out and touched Storey’s hand, and murmured something else. The man blushed beetroot red.

‘She’s saying that she wants... us... to stay with her. She anticipates a power struggle with Tioga, and says that our firepower will be of advantage.’

‘But we’ve got to be on Herzog’s trail,’ I said. ‘The longer we delay, the more chanced he has of reaching the fort ahead of us. Who knows what will happen if he is not brought to justice? But we can return to help her when that is done.’

Storey nodded. He spoke to the girl, whose face fell. But she drew herself up bravely, reached forwards and kissed him. Then she turned and walked away.

We made our way down the narrow path to the base of the cliff. The last few feet we had to jump down. Dusting myself off at the bottom I looked back. The path itself was almost invisible from down here. Just as the tunnel mouth had been impossible to discern unless one already knew it was there. No wonder the Azzi managed to remain safe within the valley for so many long years. I remembered what Sula had said about their forgotten empire, how they had fought the folk of a great western island that long ago vanished beneath the waves...

The tunnel mouth was choked with boulders. Not even a desert rat could have made its way between them. Vultures tore at the bodies of camels and Touaregs. It was a grisly, depressing scene. Storey and I soon quit the area in search of live camels.

8. Wanted

Two days later, we were riding on camel back across the desert sands. By Storey's reckoning we were heading due north, towards the fort, but to me one stretch of sand looked very much like another.

'By my reckoning,' my companion said, during a pause for food and water in the shadow of a dune—the camels had been well provisioned by their Touareg owners—'we'll reach the Wells of Youssef in a short while. There's a Legion blockhouse there, and we can report to the officer commanding, and have him telegraph a warning through to the fort and the commandant.'

I regarded this man I had cast as the villain of the piece. He wasn't such a bad chap after all.

'What really happened to you, in England?' I asked after taking a mouthful of water. 'You were accused of murdering Sir George Horncastle and stealing the Jewels of Amon. It seemed incredible at the time and now I've got to know you, it seems even more unlikely.'

Storey laughed bitterly. 'We got off on the wrong foot, didn't we, old man?' he said. 'So you want the full story, do you? Storey's story, what. Well, I'll tell you it all someday. Suffice it to say that during my career as a private detective, I made quite a reputation. And I also made some enemies.'

'Judge a man by his enemies, they say,' I murmured. 'I suppose your daring escapades ruffled a few feathers in the criminal underworld.'

He shot me a look. 'No doubt you read about it all in the illustrated papers, ,' he commented. 'The truth was rather less lurid. But it's true, time after time I solved cases that had Scotland Yard baffled. My methods of deduction were rather more penetrating than their persistent plodding. Inspector Flambard got there in the end, but I made a number of shortcuts—all above board, of course—that made for quicker results.' He shrugged. 'I had a living to make, having made rather an ass of myself working for my father's firm. Cut off with a shilling, that was about it...'

'You mean you made an enemy of Flambard of the Yard?'

He nodded. 'I made quite a game of it, in my youthful arrogance. But Flambard nursed a grudge. And I believe it was he who "framed" me as I should think Herzog would call it. I was called to a house off Grosvenor Square by the noted archaeologist Sir George Horncastle after he'd received word that a plot was afoot to murder him and steal the relics he'd excavated from an ancient temple at Luxor. He wanted protection, he wanted the mystery solved. By the end of the first night, Horncastle was dead by cobra venom and the Jewels of Amon were gone. It was perhaps the least successful of my cases.

'Inspector Flambard was on the scene first thing that morning—and found "evidence" that pointed to me as the murderer. I did everything in my power to exonerate myself, but to no avail. At last, with the country stirred up against me, I saw that it was a plot against me. I fled the country and signed up with the Legion. Of course, I had some experience of soldiering from my time volunteer regiment in the recent war in South Africa, which counted in my

favour, but my innate talents were spotted early and I was employed by the Deuxieme Bureau.'

'Flambard had Sir George murdered?' I said incredulously. 'Simply to cause trouble for you?' It seemed more than a little far-fetched.

Storey shrugged. 'He is an ambitious man, a proud man, a ruthless man. I humbled him once too often. Such is my assumption. It remains a mystery, and I am hardly in a position to solve it at the moment. One day I will exonerate myself, and I will see Flambard hang. But there was no hope of that at the time. England became too hot for me, so I headed out here to cool off.

Storey gave me a penetrating look with those hard grey eyes. 'And what brought my old school chum out here?'

I glanced at the horizon. 'Look!' I cried. 'There's the oasis!'

And as we galloped towards it, we saw in the distance a patrol of legionnaires marching south, led by a mounted officer.

Shortly afterwards, we were riding through the white walled houses of a small settlement that existed outside the blockhouse walls. Native folk in colourful robes, Berber, Touareg, Toubou, and Houssa, walked the streets, which were also home to a merry mixture of goats, chickens, camels and other livestock. We dismounted our own beasts and led them up the narrow streets towards the blockhouse where more legionnaires were standing on guard duty.

Partway up the street I paused. Pasted on the wall was a poster, with a legend in French alongside others in Arabic and Berber languages. What had drawn my attention was not the inscription so much as the illustration, which showed two men in Legion uniform. In large letters at the top was the French word RECHERCHÉ.

Storey followed my gaze. 'Dammit, Mundy,' he said with a curse. 'Herzog got here before us. He's been making trouble alright!'

'Herzog has?' I said. 'What do you mean?'

'Do you know no French?' he said through gritted teeth. 'That's a wanted poster. And those two pictures are of us.'

He strode over. 'Wanted for sedition and treachery,' he added in a low voice.

I looked around me. Natives watched us from the dark doorways of their houses. An emaciated man in an indigo robe turned and ran up the street towards the blockhouse.

Storey mounted his groaning camel hurriedly, gesturing to me to do the same. 'It's time we left, old man,' he suggested.

Moments later we were riding back down the street. From behind us came shouts and cries and shots. Looking back over my shoulder I saw that several mounted legionnaires were following close behind.

I shouted across to Storey, 'Don't you think we should stop and explain?'

He gave me a look. 'Don't think that'll do much bally good, old man,' he shouted back. 'Herzog's done too good a job.'

We reached the edge of the oasis. The sands stretched before us, a flat and monotonous wasteland as far as the horizon. I looked back as my camel's hoofs sent up flurries of dust into the spicy air. If my own experience was anything to go by, those legionnaires' pay would be meagre. I dug a hand into my pocket. It hurt me to do it, but in that moment I realised life was worth more to me than any other consideration.

With a sigh, I flung the contents of my pocket over my shoulder and spurred my camel into greater efforts. Storey at my side, I pounded off into the desert. The pursuit died away. I took one last look back to see that most of the legionnaires had dismounted and were crawling about the sand while a red faced officer bellowed at them from his camel.

9. Renegades

We were crossing a rocky plateau, leading the camels behind us, when the trail petered out at the edge of a gorge. I cursed, and surveyed the surrounding devastation.

'We must have gone awry somewhere, Storey,' I told my companion. 'This isn't the way back to the valley of the Azzi.'

Hand shading his eyes, Storey stood surveying our surroundings. At last he pointed and said, 'I think we're only a mile or two off course. Over that way was where we had our first contretemps with the Touaregs.'

'I see it,' I began, although frankly I couldn't tell one lot of rocks from another. 'So we...'

He lifted a hand for silence. 'Listen,' he said urgently. I did as he bade but heard nothing but the bleak whisper of the desert wind.

'What did you hear?' I asked.

He motioned for silence again, then led me to the edge of the gorge.

Beneath us was a precipitous declivity that led down to a rock strewn ravine floor like the one where we had been ambushed. And that was not the only similarity. Hiding behind rocks, hidden from our eyes but not those of anyone coming up the gorge, clutching matchlocks and sharing brief whispered conversations, was a group of about twenty Touaregs. I unshouldered my gun.

Storey forestalled me with an urgent look, and led me silently back to where we had left the camels to watch our comical antics with censorious expressions.

‘What did you think you were going to do?’ he hissed.

‘Why, shoot them,’ I said. ‘They’re waiting in ambush—maybe for another Legion patrol!’

He nodded shortly. ‘But even with our rifles, we would pick off only a few before they fired back. And who knows how many more are hiding among the rocks?’

‘We must do something!’ I said. A thought struck me. ‘This could be a way to redeem ourselves in the eyes of Commandant Le Boucher.’

‘Maybe,’ said Storey laconically. ‘Follow me.’

Leading the camels, we moved off in another direction, following the windings of the gorge at a distance. Storey marched in front of me, and I watched his back curious as to what he had in mind. Finally I was opening my mouth to ask him what the devil it was when he gestured me to halt, and again listen.

Floating up from the gorge came the crunch of marching boots.

Together we swarmed up on hands and knees and reached the edge of the gorge to see the uniformed figures of a Legion patrol marching up the rocky valley directly beneath us, led by a red kepiéd officer on horseback. My blood ran cold.

‘They’re marching straight into an ambush!’

Storey looked at me and nodded. ‘And look who is leading them!’

I looked again. As he rode closer, I shuddered. It was Sergeant Herzog.

The bearded man’s eyes were darting about as he rode at the head. Behind him were twenty or so Legionnaires, their white kepis gleaming in the sunlight, the bayonets on their rifles flashing from time to time. The men were trudging wearily, paying little heed to their surroundings, but Herzog was alert and expectant, though trying to hide it from his men.

‘I see it now,’ murmured Storey, peering down not looking at me. ‘He’ll lead them round the corner straight into a prearranged ambush, and ride into cover, deserting his men. That was what happened last time, but unfortunately for him he was lumbered with two Limeys. This time it’s different.’

Storey was right. This time it was different. Without a word, I loaded my rifle, rose to my feet, aimed and fired.

It was the shot of my life. Herzog clutched once at his breast, flailed at the air with his other hand, then toppled slowly off the horse.

Even before he hit the ground, the Legionnaires were alert, running about like disturbed ants. Storey rolled over to throw me an angry look. ‘You fool,’ he said, as Legionnaires started firing. ‘Now they’ll come after us.’

‘But Herzog will never betray another patrol,’ I said, as men began to swarm up the gorge walls after us.

‘This way,’ Storey said, mounting his camel. I copied him and we rode away along the canyon edge, Legionnaires racing after us after climbing the cliff. I heard one shout our names, and the epithet ‘Les renegades!’ We had been recognised.

Storey rode ahead. I couldn’t work out where he was taking us, but it looked like it was back the way we had come—back towards the Touaregs who had been waiting in ambush. As we rode, bullets whizzed around us.

As we rode, we passed the rocks where the Touaregs had been waiting in ambush. Swarthy figures in indigo robes gaped up from the rocks at us. Then the Legionnaires hove into view. They stopped dead at the scene below them.

This time the tables were turned, the situation was reversed. The Legionnaires had the advantage of high ground and the Touaregs were in plain sight. As I rode grimly on after Storey, I heard rifle fire punctuated by the popping of matchlocks.

‘Who do you think will be the victor?’ I asked Storey.

We had heard and seen nothing of either Touaregs or Legionnaires for some time, and now we were nearing the valley. Storey looked across to me.

‘The legionnaires were better equipped,’ he said, ‘and had the advantage of higher ground. And due to your rash action, Herzog will never lead any of them into an ambush. I should think the Touaregs were scattered or killed. But they recognised us, those Legionnaires. They knew us and they know we shot Herzog. It will take some explaining...’

He broke off as we rounded a corner and the slope behind which lay the valley loomed before us.

The cliff face was unrecognisable. The tunnel mouth was even more inaccessible and a flood of giant rocks spread out across the plain towards us, like a waterfall frozen in mid flow. Dust clouds still swirled in the hot desert air.

Storey pointed to the stretch of cliff that we had descended. It was gone, replaced by an even more precipitous sandstone face.

‘Now there is no hope of returning to the valley of the Azzi.’

‘What do you think happened?’ I asked.

Storey shrugged. ‘The rock fall must have weakened something in the cliff face,’ he speculated. ‘After our departure, more off the cliff came down. Now there is no hope of crossing over into the valley. It looks like Sula will have to fight her own battles.’

‘And what of us?’ I asked. But he did not answer.

Half a day later found us riding south across the desert, our water skins filled at the last waterhole, and only the endless baking white expanse of the Sahara before us. Not a single nomad was visible on any horizon. What was more heartening, there was not a sign of the French Foreign Legion. We had evaded their patrols by setting out into the bleakest, most inhospitable stretch of the desert imaginable, and were hoping to leave French territory entirely.

‘What was it,’ Storey asked, as we let our camels amble across the gritty sand, ‘that you flung to the legionnaires that caused such confusion in the ranks?’

I grinned a little guiltily. ‘When I found our rifles,’ I explained, ‘they were in what was clearly the queen’s treasury. Some of those jewels may have lain there since the days of lost Atlantis. I’d thought to keep them as a little nest egg. There will be some rich ex-legionnaires round about now, unless the sergeant confiscated it in the name of la gloire and Madame Le Republic...’

Storey shook his head wryly.

We rode onwards. ‘Perhaps one day I’ll be able to contact the Deuxieme Bureau,’ he mused as our camels ambled along, ‘Perhaps when we reach some form of civilisation and a telegraph station by which I can contact my Chief. But for the moment I think we’d be better off staying away from the French.’ He caught sight of my expression. ‘Come now, Mundy,’ he said. ‘We have a whole world before us.’

‘Yes,’ said I, ‘and with the police of two empires on our trail our options are severely limited. Britain and France rule most of the globe between them. Where can we hope to find anything other than hostility?’

‘That remains to be seen,’ said my companion. We had both discarded much of our legionnaire uniform but both wore the white kepis we were thought to have disgraced. ‘Let us hope that Sula won the power struggle, wielding that rifle if not this telekinesis mumbo-jumbo, but I fear for her safety...’

‘So we simply strike out into the unknown,’ I said, ‘hoping to find a safe harbour.’ But I understood his point. Frankly I was sick of the Legion. Too much esprit d’corp can give a chap a fearful hangover

‘Any port in a storm,’ he said imperturbably. ‘Things have grown too hot for us in the Sahara. We are renegades, you and I. Cut off from our homeland and much of the civilised world by misunderstandings and misfortune. We’ll have to learn to live by our wits. Well, let us ride on, to seek our destiny, whatever that may be.’

We rode into the sun.

THE END

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BURN, WITCH, BURN by A Merritt

Foreword

I am a medical man specializing in neurology and diseases of the brain. My peculiar field is abnormal psychology, and in it I am recognized as an expert. I am closely connected with two of the foremost hospitals in New York, and have received many honours in this country and abroad. I set this down, risking identification, not through egotism but because I desire to show that I was competent to observe, and competent to bring practiced scientific judgment upon, the singular events I am about to relate.

I say that I risk identification, because Lowell is not my name. It is a pseudonym, as are the names of all the other characters in this narrative. The reasons for this evasion will become increasingly apparent.

Yet I have the strongest feeling that the facts and observations which in my casebooks are grouped under the heading of "The Dolls of Mme. Mandilip" should be clarified, set down in orderly sequence and be made known. Obviously, I could do this in the form of a report to one of my medical societies, but I am too well aware of the way my colleagues would receive such a paper, and with what suspicion, pity or even abhorrence, they would henceforth regard me, so counter to accepted notions of cause and effect do many of these facts and observations run.

But now, orthodox man of medicine that I am, I ask myself whether there may not be causes other than those we admit. Forces and energies which we stubbornly disavow because we can find no explanation for them within the narrow confines of our present knowledge. Energies whose reality is recognized in folklore, the ancient traditions, of all peoples, and which, to justify our ignorance, we label myth and superstition.

A wisdom, a science, immeasurably old. Born before history, but never dying nor ever wholly lost. A secret wisdom, but always with its priests and priestesses guarding its dark flame, passing it on from century to century. Dark flame of forbidden knowledge... burning in Egypt before even the Pyramids were raised; and in temples crumbling now beneath the Gobi's sands; known to the sons of Ad whom Allah, so say the Arabs, turned to stone for their sorceries ten thousand years before Abraham trod the streets of Ur of the Chaldees; known in China—and known to the Tibetan lama, the Buryat shaman of the steppes and to the warlock of the South Seas alike.

Dark flame of evil wisdom... deepening the shadows of Stonehenge's brooding menhirs; fed later by hands of Roman legionaries; gathering strength, none knows why, in medieval Europe... And still burning, still alive, still strong.

Enough of preamble. I begin where the dark wisdom, if that it were, first cast its shadow upon me.

I.—The Unknown Death

I HEARD the clock strike one as I walked up the hospital steps. Ordinarily I would have been in bed and asleep, but there was a case in which I was much interested, and Braile, my assistant, had telephoned me of certain developments which I wished to observe. It was a

night in early November. I paused for a moment at the top of the steps to look at the brilliancy of the stars. As I did so an automobile drew up at the entrance to the hospital.

As I stood, wondering what its arrival at that hour meant, a man slipped out of it. He looked sharply up and down the deserted street, then threw the door wide open. Another man emerged. The two of them stooped and seemed to be fumbling around inside. They straightened and then I saw that they had locked their arms around the shoulders of a third. They moved forward, not supporting but carrying this other man. His head hung upon his breast and his body swung limply.

A fourth man stepped from the automobile.

I recognized him. He was Julian Ricori, a notorious underworld chieftain, one of the finished products of the Prohibition Law. He had been pointed out to me several times. Even if he had not been, the newspapers would have made me familiar with his features and figure. Lean and long, with silvery white hair, always immaculately dressed, a leisured type from outward seeming, rather than leader of such activities as those of which he was accused.

I had been standing in the shadow, unnoticed. I stepped out of the shadow. Instantly the burdened pair halted, swiftly as hunting hounds. Their free hands dropped into the pockets of their coats. Menace was in that movement.

“I am Dr. Lowell,” I said, hastily. “Connected with the hospital. Come right along.”

They did not answer me. Nor did their gaze waver from me; nor did they move. Ricori stepped in front of them. His hands were also in his pockets. He looked me over, then nodded to the others; I felt the tension relax.

“I know you, Doctor,” he said pleasantly, in oddly precise English. “But that was quite a chance you took. If I might advise you, it is not well to move so quickly when those come whom you do not know, and at night—not in this town.”

“But,” I said, “I do know you, Mr. Ricori.”

“Then,” he smiled, faintly, “your judgment was doubly at fault. And my advice doubly pertinent.”

There was an awkward moment of silence. He broke it.

“And being who I am, I shall feel much better inside your doors than outside.”

I opened the doors. The two men passed through with their burden, and after them Ricori and I. Once within, I gave way to my professional instincts and stepped up to the man the two were carrying. They shot a quick glance at Ricori. He nodded. I raised the man’s head.

A little shock went through me. The man’s eyes were wide open. He was neither dead nor unconscious. But upon his face was the most extraordinary expression of terror I had ever seen in a long experience with sane, insane and borderland cases. It was not undiluted fear. It was mixed with an equally disturbing horror. The eyes, blue and with distended pupils, were like exclamation points to the emotions printed upon that face. They stared up at me, through

me and beyond me. And still they seemed to be looking inward—as though whatever nightmare vision they were seeing was both behind and in front of them.

“Exactly!” Ricori had been watching me closely. “Exactly, Dr. Lowell, what could it be that my friend has seen—or has been given—that could make him appear so? I am most anxious to learn. I am willing to spend much money to learn. I wish him cured, yes—but I shall be frank with you, Dr. Lowell. I would give my last penny for the certainty that those who did this to him could not do the same thing to me—could not make me as he is, could not make me see what he is seeing, could not make feel what he is feeling.”

At my signal, orderlies had come up. They took the patient and laid him on a stretcher. By this time the resident physician had appeared. Ricori touched my elbow.

“I know a great deal about you, Dr. Lowell,” he said. “I would like you to take full charge of this case.”

I hesitated.

He continued, earnestly: “Could you drop everything else? Spend all your time upon it? Bring in any others you wish to consult—don’t think of expense-”

“A moment, Mr. Ricori,” I broke in. “I have patients who cannot be neglected. I will give all the time I can spare, and so will my assistant, Dr. Braile. Your friend will be constantly under observation here by people who have my complete confidence. Do you wish me to take the case under those conditions?”

He acquiesced, though I could see he was not entirely satisfied. I had the patient taken to an isolated private room, and went through the necessary hospital formalities. Ricori gave the man’s name as Thomas Peters, asserted that he knew of no close relations, had himself recorded at Peters’ nearest friend, assumed all responsibility, and taking out a roll of currency, skimmed a thousand dollar bill from it, passing it to the desk as “preliminary costs.”

I asked Ricori if he would like to be present at my examination. He said that he would. He spoke to his two men, and they took positions at each side of the hospital doors—on guard. Ricori and I went to the room assigned to the patient. The orderlies had stripped him, and he lay upon the adjustable cot, covered by a sheet. Braile, for whom I had sent, was bending over Peters, intent upon his face, and plainly puzzled. I saw with satisfaction that Nurse Walters, an unusually capable and conscientious young woman, had been assigned to the case. Braile looked up at me. He said: “Obviously some drug.”

“Maybe,” I answered. “But if so then a drug I have never encountered. Look at his eyes-”

I closed Peters’ lids. As soon as I had lifted my fingers they began to rise, slowly, until they were again wide open. Several times I tried to shut them. Always they opened: the terror, the horror in them, undiminished.

I began my examination. The entire body was limp, muscles and joints. It was as flaccid, the simile came to me, as a doll. It was as though every motor nerve had gone out of business. Yet there was none of the familiar symptoms of paralysis. Nor did the body respond to any

sensory stimulus, although I struck down into the nerve trunks. The only reaction I could obtain was a slight contraction of the dilated pupils under strongest light.

Hoskins, the pathologist, came in to take his samples for blood tests. When he had drawn what he wanted, I went over the body minutely. I could find not a single puncture, wound, bruise or abrasion. Peters was hairy. With Ricori's permission, I had him shaved clean—chest, shoulders, legs, even the head. I found nothing to indicate that a drug might have been given him by hypodermic. I had the stomach emptied and took specimens from the excretory organs, including the skin. I examined the membranes of nose and throat: they seemed healthy and normal; nevertheless, I had smears taken from them. The blood pressure was low, the temperature slightly subnormal; but that might mean nothing. I gave an injection of adrenaline. There was absolutely no reaction from it. That might mean much.

“Poor devil,” I said to myself. “I’m going to try to kill that nightmare for you, at any rate.”

I gave him a minimum hypo of morphine. It might have been water for all the good it did. Then I gave him all I dared. His eyes remained open, terror and horror undiminished. And pulse and respiration unchanged.

Ricori had watched all these operations with intense interest. I had done all I could for the time, and told him so.

“I can do no more,” I said, “until I receive the reports of the specimens. Frankly, I am all at sea. I know of no disease nor drug which would produce these conditions.”

“But Dr. Braile,” he said, “mentioned a drug—”

“A suggestion only,” interposed Braile hastily. “Like Dr. Lowell, I know of no drug which would cause such symptoms.”

Ricori glanced at Peters' face and shivered.

“Now,” I said, “I must ask you some questions. Has this man been ill? If so, has he been under medical care? If he has not actually been ill, has he spoken of any discomfort? Or have you noticed anything unusual in his manner or behaviour?”

“No, to all questions,” he answered. “Peters has been in closest touch with me for the past week. He has not been ailing in the least. Tonight we were talking in my apartments, eating a late and light dinner. He was in high spirits. In the middle of a word, he stopped, half-turned his head as though listening; then slipped from his chair to the floor. When I bent over him he was as you see him now. That was precisely half after midnight. I brought him here at once.”

“Well,” I said, “that at least gives us the exact time of the seizure. There is no use of your remaining, Mr. Ricori, unless you wish.”

He studied his hands a few moments, rubbing the carefully manicured nails.

“Dr. Lowell,” he said at last, “if this man dies without your discovering what killed him, I will pay you the customary fees and the hospital the customary charges and no more. If he dies and you make this discovery after his death, I will give a hundred thousand dollars to any

charity you name. But if you make the discovery before he dies, and restore him to health—I will give you the same sum.”

We stared at him, and then as the significance of this remarkable offer sank in, I found it hard to curb my anger.

“Ricori,” I said, “you and I live in different worlds, therefore I answer you politely, although I find it difficult. I will do all in my power to find out what is the matter with your friend and to cure him. I would do that if he and you were paupers. I am interested in him only as a problem which challenges me as a physician. But I am not interested in you in the slightest. Nor in your money. Nor in your offer. Consider it definitely rejected. Do you thoroughly understand that?”

He betrayed no resentment.

“So much so that more than ever do I wish you to take full charge,” he said.

“Very well. Now where can I get you if I want to bring you here quickly?”

“With your permission,” he answered, “I should like to have—well, representatives—in this room at all times. There will be two of them. If you want me, tell them—and I will soon be here.”

I smiled at that, but he did not.

“You have reminded me,” he said, “that we live in different worlds. You take your precautions to go safely in your world—and I order my life to minimize the perils of mine. Not for a moment would I presume to advise you how to walk among the dangers of your laboratory, Dr. Lowell. I have the counterparts of those dangers. Bene—I guard against them as best I can.”

It was a most irregular request, of course. But I found myself close to liking Ricori just then, and saw clearly his point of view. He knew that and pressed the advantage.

“My men will be no bother,” he said. “They will not interfere in any way with you. If what I suspect to be true is true they will be a protection for you and your aids as well. But they, and those who relieve them, must stay in the room night and day. If Peters is taken from the room, they must accompany him—no matter where it is that he is taken.”

“I can arrange it,” I said. Then, at his request, I sent an orderly down to the doors. He returned with one of the men Ricori had left on guard. Ricori whispered to him, and he went out. In a little while two other men came up. In the meantime I had explained the peculiar situation to the resident and the superintendent and secured the necessary permission for their stay.

The two men were well-dressed, polite, of a singularly tight—lipped and cold-eyed alertness. One of them shot a glance at Peters.

“Christ!” he muttered.

The room was a corner one with two windows, one opening out on the Drive, the other on the side street. Besides these, there were no outer openings except the door to the hall; the private bathroom being enclosed and having no windows. Ricori and the two inspected the room minutely, keeping away, I noticed, from the windows. He asked me then if the room could be darkened. Much interested, I nodded. The lights were turned off, the three went to the windows, opened them and carefully scrutinized the six-story sheer drop to both streets. On the side of the Drive there is nothing but the open space above the park. Opposite the other side is a church.

“It is at this side you must watch,” I heard Ricori say; he pointed to the church. “You can turn the lights on now, Doctor.”

He started toward the door, then turned.

“I have many enemies, Dr. Lowell. Peters was my right hand. If it was one of these enemies who struck him, he did it to weaken me. Or, perhaps, because he had not the opportunity to strike at me. I look at Peters, and for the first time in my life I, Ricori—am afraid. I have no wish to be the next, I have no wish to look into hell!”

I grunted at that! He had put so aptly what I had felt and had not formulated into words.

He started to open the door. He hesitated.

“One thing more. If there should be any telephone calls inquiring as to Peters’ condition let one of these men, or their reliefs, answer. If any should come in person making inquiry, allow them to come up—but if they are more than one, let only one come at a time. If any should appear, asserting that they are relations, again let these men meet and question them.”

He gripped my hand, then opened the door of the room. Another pair of the efficient-appearing retainers were awaiting him at the threshold. They swung in before and behind him. As he walked away, I saw that he was crossing himself vigorously.

I closed the door and went back into the room. I looked down on Peters.

If I had been religious, I too would have been doing some crossing. The expression on Peters’ face had changed. The terror and horror were gone. He still seemed to be looking both beyond me and into himself, but it was a look of evil expectancy—so evil that involuntarily I shot a glance over my shoulder to see what ugly thing might be creeping upon me.

There was nothing. One of Ricori’s gunmen sat in the corner of the window, in the shadow, watching the parapet of the church roof opposite; the other sat stolidly at the door.

Braile and Nurse Walters were at the other side of the bed. Their eyes were fixed with horrified fascination on Peters’ face. And then I saw Braile turn his head and stare about the room as I had.

Suddenly Peters’ eyes seemed to focus, to become aware of the three of us, to become aware of the entire room. They flashed with an unholy glee. That glee was not maniacal—it was diabolical. It was the look of a devil long exiled from his well—beloved hell, and suddenly summoned to return.

Or was it like the glee of some devil sent hurtling out of his hell to work his will upon whom he might?

Very well do I know how fantastic, how utterly unscientific, are such comparisons. Yet not otherwise can I describe that strange change.

Then, abruptly as the closing of a camera shutter, that expression fled and the old terror and horror came back. I gave an involuntary gasp of relief, for it was precisely as though some evil presence had withdrawn. The nurse was trembling; Braile asked, in a strained voice: “How about another hypodermic?”

“No,” I said. “I want you to watch the progress of this—whatever it is—without drugs. I’m going down to the laboratory. Watch him closely until I return.”

I went down to the laboratory. Hoskins looked up at me.

“Nothing wrong, so far. Remarkable health, I’d say. Of course all I’ve results on are the simpler tests.”

I nodded. I had an uncomfortable feeling that the other tests also would show nothing. And I had been more shaken than I would have cared to confess by those alternations of hellish fear, hellish expectancy and hellish glee in Peters’ face and eyes. The whole case troubled me, gave me a nightmarish feeling of standing outside some door which it was vitally important to open, and to which not only did I have no key but couldn’t find the keyhole. I have found that concentration upon microscopic work often permits me to think more freely upon problems. So I took a few smears of Peters’ blood and began to study them, not with any expectation of finding anything, but to slip the brakes from another part of my brain.

I was on my fourth slide when I suddenly realized that I was looking at the incredible. As I had perfunctorily moved the slide, a white corpuscle had slid into the field of vision. Only a simple white corpuscle—but within it was a spark of phosphorescence, shining out like a tiny lamp!

I thought at first that it was some effect of the light, but no manipulation of the illumination changed that spark. I rubbed my eyes and looked again. I called Hoskins.

“Tell me if you see something peculiar in there.”

He peered into the microscope. He started, then shifted the light as I had.

“What do you see, Hoskins?”

He said, still staring through the lens:

“A leucocyte inside of which is a globe of phosphorescence. Its glow is neither dimmed when I turn on the full illumination, nor is it increased when I lessen it. In all except the ingested globe the corpuscle seems normal.”

“And all of which,” I said, “is quite impossible.”

“Quite,” he agreed, straightening. “Yet there it is!”

I transferred the slide to the micro-manipulator, hoping to isolate the corpuscle, and touched it with the tip of the manipulating needle. At the instant of contact the corpuscle seemed to burst. The globe of phosphorescence appeared to flatten, and something like a miniature flash of heat-lightning ran over the visible portion of the slide.

And that was all—the phosphorescence was gone.

We prepared and examined slide after slide. Twice more we found a tiny shining globe, and each time with the same result, the bursting corpuscle, the strange flicker of faint luminosity—then nothing.

The laboratory ‘phone rang. Hoskins answered.

“It’s Braile. He wants you—quick.”

“Keep after it, Hoskins,” I said, and hastened to Peters’ room. Entering, I saw Nurse Walters, face chalk white, eyes closed, standing with her back turned to the bed. Braile was leaning over the patient, stethoscope to his heart. I looked at Peters; and stood stock still, something like a touch of unreasoning panic at my own heart. Upon his face was that look of devilish expectancy, but intensified. As I looked, it gave way to the diabolic joy, and that, too, was intensified. The face held it for not many seconds. Back came the expectancy then on its heels the unholy glee. The two expressions alternated, rapidly. They flickered over Peters’ face like—like the flickers of the tiny lights within the corpuscles of his blood. Braile spoke to me through stiff lips:

“His heart stopped three minutes ago! He ought to be dead—yet listen-”

The body of Peters stretched and stiffened. A sound came from his lips—a chuckling sound; low yet singularly penetrating, inhuman, the chattering laughter of a devil. The gunman at the window leaped to his feet, his chair going over with a crash. The laughter choked and died away, and the body of Peters lay limp.

I heard the door open, and Ricori’s voice: “How is he, Dr. Lowell? I could not sleep-” He saw Peters’ face.

“Mother of Christ!” I heard him whisper. He dropped to his knees.

I saw him dimly for I could not take my eyes from Peters’ face. It was the face of a grinning, triumphant fiend—all humanity wiped from it—the face of a demon straight out of some mad medieval painter’s hell. The blue eyes, now utterly malignant, glared at Ricori.

And as I looked, the dead hands moved; slowly the arms bent up from the elbows, the fingers contracting like claws; the dead body began to stir beneath the covers -

At that the spell of nightmare dropped from me; for the first time in hours I was on ground that I knew. It was the rigor mortis, the stiffening of death—but setting in more quickly and proceeding at a rate I had never known.

I stepped forward and drew the lids down over the glaring eyes. I covered the dreadful face.

I looked at Ricori. He was still on his knees, crossing himself and praying. And kneeling beside him, arm around his shoulders, was Nurse Walters, and she, too, was praying.

Somewhere a clock struck five.

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POLARIS OF THE SNOWS by Charles B Stilson

6. Into the Unknown

Southward, ever southward, the floating glory of the jewelled tide bore them.

Fast as they went, the wind-urged waters raced by them faster still. Steel-blue surges, mountain high, tore by their refuge in endless rush. From a sky gale-swept of all clouds, the sun shone steadily through nightless days.

Fragment after fragment of the drifting floe was rasped away and ground to splinters among the staggering icebergs. As it dwindled in dimensions, its revolving movement increased, until it reeled onward like a giant gyroscope, and they who rode it grew giddy with its whirl.

Around them nature played her heartshaking music, and spread over glittering tide and snow-splashed icebergs the wondrous, iridescent filaments reflected from the facets of her monstrous gems.

Then, as suddenly as it had risen, the wind died away. Cloudheads arose and overcast the sky, the ragged waves smoothed into long rollers, and their frightful pace was abated, although they continued to ride south with a strong tide.

A few hours later it seemed that the wind had been to the end of the world and had turned to hurry northward again, for it began to beat up steadily from ahead of them, but not strongly enough to overcome the tide it had set with it in its headlong dash. To their left, far away, they could catch occasional glimpses of a jagged coastline.

Out to the right little was to be seen but the tossing flotilla of bergs, gradually fretting away into tide ice.

With the return of the wind from the south, Polaris was puzzled to note once more the recurrence of a phenomenon over which he had pondered often. The air was growing warmer!

Another manifestation came; more puzzling by far—than that of the warming breeze.

One day they awoke and found the air filled with drifting white particles. As far • as the eye could see it seemed that a shower of fine snow was falling. But the storm was not of snow!

Settling weblike in the crannies of the ice, filming the crests of the waves, hanging impalpably in the breeze, it was ashes that was falling!

Whence came this strangest of all storms?

Polaris and Rose Emer stared at each other, completely at a loss.

“If we are to go far enough, we are to find out some great new thing, lady,” said the man.

Soon after the battle with the bears they had abandoned the first iceberg. The floe had broken away on that side until the berg's sheer side was opposed to the fury of the wind and waves, and Polaris feared that it would topple under the constant impact with other bergs, and pitch them into the tide. They crossed the narrow path to the twin berg, threaded the pass of the bears, and found on the farther side a cavern in the ice, partly filled with drift snow, where the animals had made their lair. There they were now confined, as in a castle. The plane of the floe had all been beaten away. Even the ridge between the bergs was gone, and the waves rolled between the twin towers of ice, still held together beneath the surface of the waters by a bond that no crash had severed.

The wind subsided, but the air remained warm. No longer were they within the realm of eternal ice, for, outside their prison, the surfaces of the revolving bergs at times actually dripped. The ice was thawing!

Then a kink in the current caught them and shot them straight to shore. From the crest of their watchtower, Polaris and the girl viewed the approach. Along the shoreline for miles the drift ice lay like a scum on the water, with here and there the remnant of a mighty iceberg jutting up.

Of those, their own refuge was the largest remaining.

Beyond the drift ice the land seemed covered with heavy snow, and far inland were hills. To the northward, perhaps a mile, a mountain range that seemed like a mighty wall curved from the horizon to the lap of the sea, and terminated at the water's edge in a sheer and gleaming face, many hundred feet high. Just ahead a promontory extended out toward them, and beyond it lay a cove. The heavens to the southward were piled with dull cloud-banks that curled and shifted in the slow wind.

"It may be that this will be a rough landing, lady," said Polaris. "Our tower is going to pieces, and here we may not stay. I will make ready the sledge. We must cross the drift ice to the shore in some manner."

He packed their stores on the sledge, with the robes and all that made their little camp, and hauled everything to what seemed the most solid portion of the berg. Instinctive seemed the wisdom that guided the man. The twin bergs, driven on by the last impulse of the current, ploughed through the drift ice like a stately ship, and were broken asunder across the point of the promontory.

Their revolutions laid them right across the snow-covered point of land. As they swung on, the berg which they had quitted was southernmost. There was a dull shock of impact, and beneath their feet the solid ice quivered. The farther berg pushed on around the point in a swirl of foam and ice. Their own ice castle swung to the north side of the promontory, keeled over at a terrifying angle, and began to settle.

Above them loomed the beetling masses of ice with the dark shadow of the cave mouth. Below was the nose of the promontory, covered deep with snow. Farther and farther leaned the berg.

"We have but a moment!" cried Polaris. "We must leap. The berg will fall on the land or slide into the sea. It is turning over!"

He seized the sledge, half lifted it, and hurled it from the tilting berg into the snow.

Then he caught the girl in his arms and leaped, putting all his strength into the jump.

Out into the air they shot, and—down, down. Around them as they fell the sky seemed to be showering dogs as the seven of the pack followed their master. Then man and girl and dogs vanished in the soft snow, and the iceberg went thundering and crashing to its fall.

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