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Schlock!

WEBZINE

**THE FIVE
FARSTAR
BROTHERS**

BY EW
FARNSWORTH
PASSWORD:
ARCTURUS...

**THE
THIRTEENTH
DISCIPLE**

BY CARLTON
HERZOG—
A BAD SEED...

**S. WALLOW
BY CHRISTOPHER T
DABROWSKI**

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**THE NIGHTMARE
BY STEVEN
HAVELOCK**

SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

Edited by
Gavin Chappell

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Hyne*

SCHLOCK! WEBZINE

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

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

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Schlock! Webzine is always willing to consider new science fiction, fantasy and horror short stories, serials, graphic novels and comic strips, reviews and art. Submit fiction, articles, art, or links to your own site to editor@schlock.co.uk. We 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. 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 *A description of the fall of Atlantis* by [Monsù Desiderio](#) Graphic design © by [Gavin Chappell](#), logo design © by C Priest Brumley.

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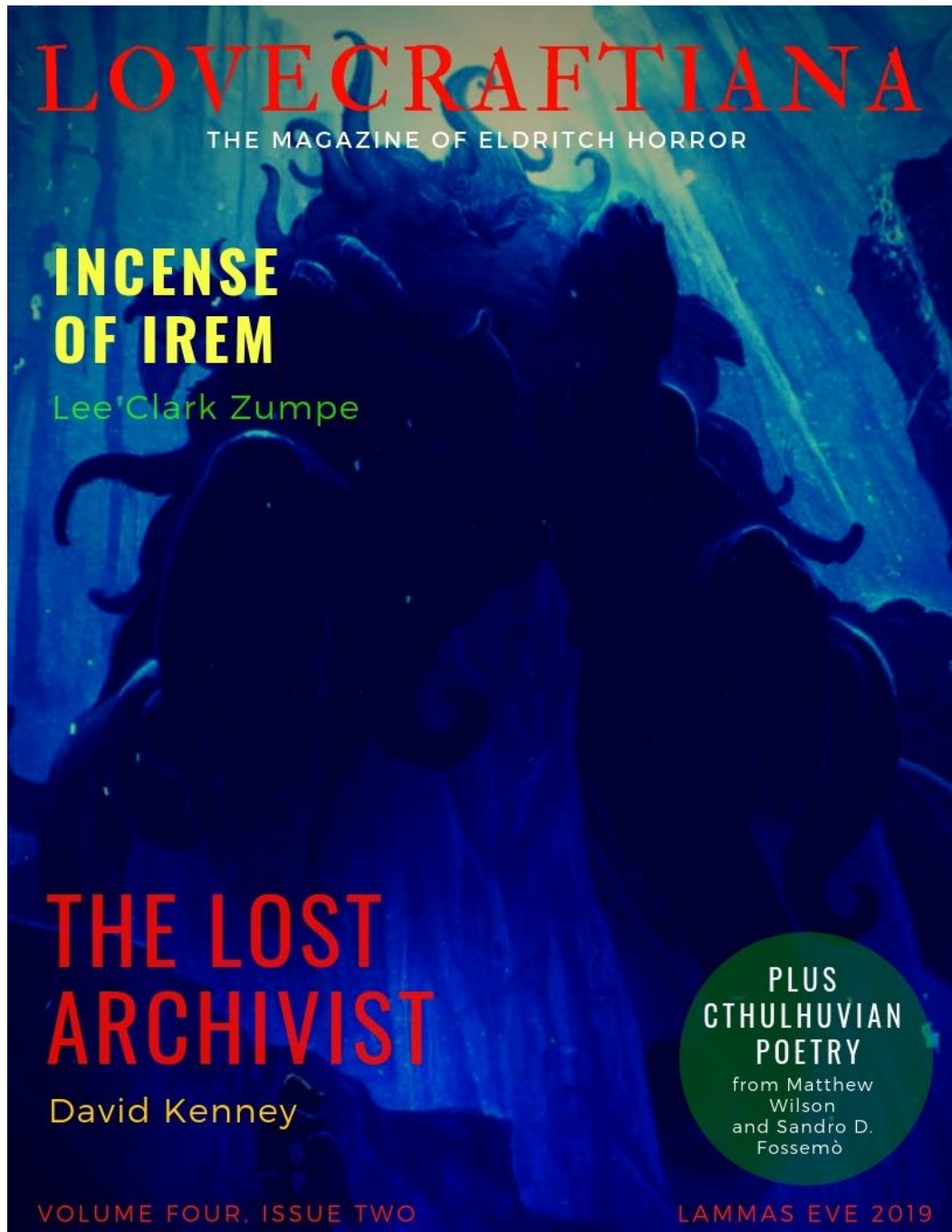
EDITORIAL

This week Manny Farstar answers some questions. Heinrich Heine hears distant laughter. We learn the shocking true identity of Jesus. And we have two very different time travel stories.

In Cumbria, Colin Ferguson regrets looking for excitement on the graveyard shift. Meanwhile, a mad scientist discloses a profound secret. And Atlantis succumbs to its destiny.

—Gavin Chappell

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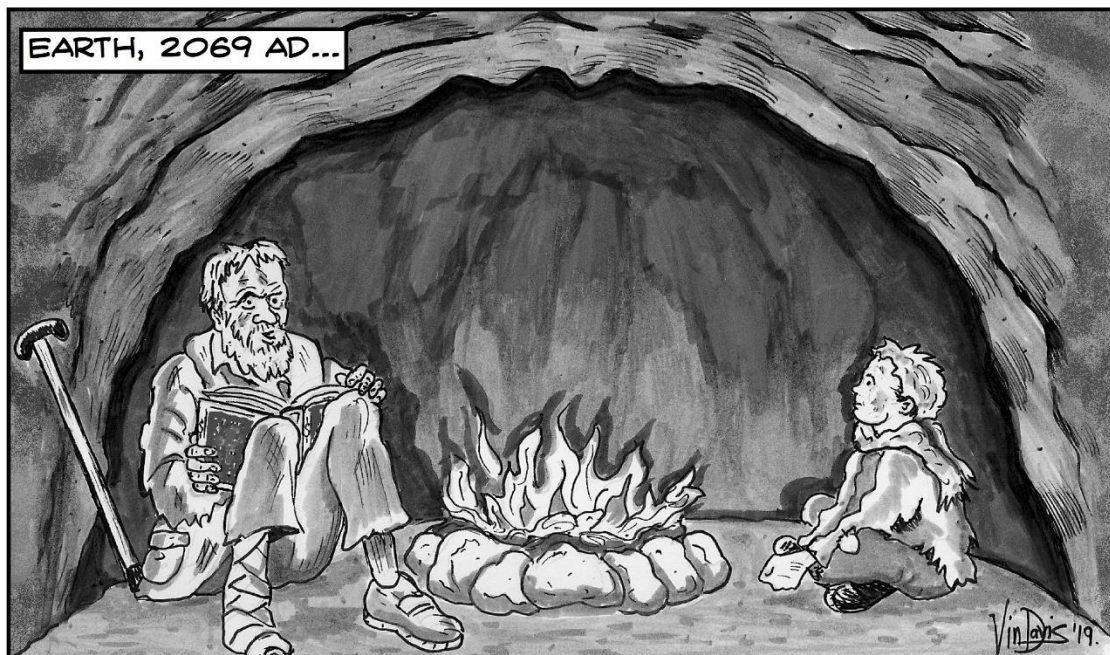


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IT CAME FROM INSIDE THE INKWELL!

IT CAME FROM INSIDE THE INKWELL!

By Vincent Davis



OH GRANDSON, THOSE WERE GOOD TIMES. WE NEVER HAD TO GO **OUT THERE** BECAUSE THE AMAZON BIRD BROUGHT US EVERYTHING WE NEEDED. SOMETIMES IN TWO DAYS, WITH FREE SHIPPING!

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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THE FIVE FARSTAR BROTHERS by EW Farnsworth

Manny Farstar reluctantly answered his new 3Maggie's questions about his family and, specifically, what they did in the time leading up to the launch of the Spaceship Arcturus. His former 3Maggie never wanted to discover intimate aspects of the Edgemaster's past; her focus was only on the future. But the replacement, whose composition included the feelings of the librarian Ms. Hygeia Frictenicht, was always surprising him. She also exhibited subtle motions so attractive on account of their grace and charm that Farstar would forget his feelings of loss for her matchless predecessor.

"You asked about my family. What can I say? My four brothers and I were raised to course through the stars. We attended the Space Academy and were valedictorians in five successive years. Often brothers and sisters were indoctrinated for classified work on the grounds that family members might be less susceptible to treachery than folks who were not related. My brothers and I—did I mention that I was the eldest?—we were treated as if we were a special unit. Our mother and father were general officers in the Space Force, so we were given plum missions. By that I mean the most dangerous assignments, not the easiest."

She smiled at him, her eyes full of wonder. "Can you give examples?"

"We were asked to perform speed trials on the most advanced spacecraft. We were sent past the known frontiers of our solar system, then our galaxy. When we discovered that the Empire already had conquered the known universe, we became the point special force against a threat that had to be kept totally secret from the masses. The leader of the Federation, which was the controlling body of the solar system, used us as his private army. Of course, he knew the darkest secrets, and, of course, he was treasonous because of the riches the Emperor promised him to deliver the Federation without engaging in a costly war."

"I know the history, Manny. What I'd like to find out is what your family did in the few years before the launch."

"It shouldn't be surprising that the more we discovered about the state of affairs in the cosmos, the more we became involved in what became the resistance. More than that, I led my brothers to understand that, to survive, we could be neither fish nor fowl in the coming struggle. The Federation was headed for self-immolation, and we had to be ready to survive outside our birth context even if we had to go to the far corners of the universe to do that."

"I'm listening. Please don't stop there. Go on."

"Alex was the logistician. Crytox was the cryptographer. Max was the weaponeer. Sibley was the communicator. I was the operator. All of us knew the others' roles as well as we knew our own. That way, if the Empire—or the Federation—terminated any of us, the others would carry on."

"But what were you doing all these things for?" She was imploring him now with a faraway look in her eyes. She was desperate to know the truth. In fact, Manny had never known a robot with such a passion for knowing. She was like a small child always asking the question why, iteratively, to get to the ultimate mysteries.

Manny shook his head. “We did what we had to do. Our mother and father were arrested, tortured under implemented interrogation and executed by the Federation while we were out on assignments. We returned to discover their brains had been rendered for use in the brain banks. That last voyage home was our last before we decided to go our separate ways and never regroup for any reason while we fought both the Federation and the Empire with all the means we could muster.”

“The need for revenge runs deep in humans. I understand that intellectually, but I have a hard time grasping its essence.”

Farstar looked into her eyes for a long time. When a buzzer sounded, she broke their eye contact and announced, “We have arrived at the coordinates you were given. Shall I begin transmitting the ‘meet me’ code?”

“Thank you for letting me know the score. We’ll continue our talk about my family later—after we complete our current mission. No, wait on transmitting the code until we have searched the area for signs of assassins.”

She nodded. “Our passive sensors show no contacts for at least one parsec in every direction. We seem to be in a lock-out area. I hope you entered the correct coordinates for our destination.”

Manny went to the command centre display and checked each passive sensor. When he had verified her intelligence, he said, “I offset the rendezvous by one parsec to give us time and space to reconnoitre. This sector is clear. We’ll move sector by sector until we have checked out each of six such surrounding our objective. Only when we have made sure we have no unwelcome visitors will we send the code.”

For the next Earth week, they changed position until they had done the surveillance Manny required. In the process, they discovered one spacecraft patiently waiting. Manny supposed that was the vehicle for his contact.

“3Maggie, let’s bring our spacecraft around to a space within the cone of 5 degrees around the rear of the lone visiting spacecraft. Open the weapons bays and train the lasers on the fuel cells of the target. When you are ready, let me know.”

Before she had completed his orders, a weak light signal from the visitor gave the password ARCTURUS. It continued radiating the coded light signal as 3Maggie completed her operations.

“Manny, I’m ready to fire. What are your instructions?”

“Stand by, 3Maggie, to establish a ship-to-ship communication path between our vessel and the visitor. The first communication to send on that new path will be the code word ARCTURUS, repeated until we get a response. Send the signal when you are ready.”

The elaborate dance began. The result was a two-way communication path that allowed Manny to conduct a face to face interview with the pilot of the other spaceship.

The care-worn face of the trillionaire Frictenicht filled the display. 3Maggie gasped in surprise. Farstar swallowed and said, “Greetings, father of Hygeia, why have you summonsed me to this meeting?”

“I see that your 3Maggie favours the young woman who used to be my daughter. She looks happy. I’m pleased. I hope you find her satisfactory.”

Farstar kept his eyes on those of the old man. “Again, I ask you, why are we here?”

“The deterioration of the Empire continues. Galaxy by galaxy and solar system by solar system, the rack and ruin drags all vestiges of civilization into a black hole of oblivion. I speak metaphorically, of course. Our last adventure brought us to a distant meeting place where we completed a bargain. Do you recall where we met?”

“How could I forget? You held a weapon at my head while we discussed our relationship sitting on the edge of an empty grave on one of my three goat planets. I must assume you arranged since then to retitle those planets as yours.”

“You gave me the documentation for the planets, but you did not specify which of the three planets was the one I desired. I had no choice but to retitle all three under my name alone.”

Farstar kept one hand near the fire activation switch. “It hardly mattered which contained the treasure if you made all three yours.”

The trillionaire laughed. “After we left that planet, the imperial forces landed and occupied not just the goat planets but the entire solar system. They seemed to be confused about why they were ordered to possess that system because they stayed for only a short while before they departed for other operations.”

“You mean they left that system unguarded? After taking the trouble to send a force to conquer it?”

“Even the Empire has limited resources. I was curious why they failed to take the usual measures, particularly since the value of the correct goat planet is beyond calculation. Do you happen to know the answer to that question?”

Farstar’s finger edged toward the firing switch, but he felt 3Maggie’s hand close gently over his right hand.

“Father, I can give you that information. I have done a deep penetration of Manny Farstar’s mind. When he took possession of the correct goat island, he blocked communication by the imperial guard to their home base. He also confiscated all records pertaining to the planet. Aside from the information I mined from the library on Phobos—when I was a human and a librarian—there was no other record of the assay results for that planet. In fact, it was anomalous among the one hundred one then-known resource orbs. I had deduced that the imperial court—or perhaps the Emperor or Empress—had purposely kept records of that repository of wealth a secret from everyone else in the universe.”

Farstar was now looking at his 3Maggie with his brow furrowed. “3Maggie, are you a robot, or are you a human now?”

The AI smiled sadly. “Eons ago, it seems, a brilliant man made that the test for artificial intelligences, didn’t he? I’m afraid I must answer in the only way suitable: Manny Farstar, are you a human, or a robot?”

The Edgemaster blinked. He genuinely searched his soul for the answer to that question. “Since a being I thought was an AI has asked me the definitive question about my own core being, I must assume there is doubt in her computations about my being a human.”

Frictenicht interrupted them. “I don’t really care whether one or both of you are AIs or humans. And I have too much on my mind to wait until you sort out your respective situations for yourselves. We are alone now, but we won’t be without company for long. As Manny Farstar knows, he and his brothers have been marked down for termination by the Emperor for being a leading figure of the resistance. The reward for capturing or killing the infamous Manny Farstar is substantial. Say, if I were to kill Farstar now, I’d probably triple my fortune. You who were my daughter once, please tell me what I should do!”

“My former father, I’m enjoying Farstar’s company far too much to be deprived of it right now. You stole my life as a human while I was in my prime. It hardly seems fair that I should terminate yours while you are on the brink of expanding your fortune.”

“Did you say, ‘terminate,’ former daughter?”

By way of answer, 3Maggie released Manny’s hand and reached over it to press the firing key. The intended result was the destruction of the vessel from which Frictenicht’s signals had been emanating. Fragments of the spacecraft and its occupant were atomized. The robot shrugged and patted Farstar on the hand.

“Manny Farstar, it seems we have come a long way for nothing.”

The Edgemaster said, “Not nothing, 3Maggie. We have learned critical knowledge about the goat planets, and I have learned much about you.”

“You’ll have to enlighten me about both, Manny. But I’ll first have to get your instructions about departing a place where the imperial forces are soon to arrive.”

“You’re right, 3Maggie. I’ll input the coordinates. Once they have been entered, you set our course to that objective with five waypoints. Use various speeds between waypoints and keep a close watch on this location for intelligence about the arrival of the imperial forces.”

The AI effortlessly did as she was ordered. “We are on the first leg of our journey. Autopilot will execute all turns until we reach our objective. Now will you explain?”

Farstar sat back in his captain’s chair and made a steeple out of his fingers. “Your former father informed us that the Empire really knows nothing about the riches of goat planet even though someone at the imperial court may know everything about them. About you, I learned that you have your former father’s instincts but your own will to survive.”

“What about my will to survive?”

“If you had not destroyed your former father’s space ship, he would have destroyed ours. By killing him, you interdicted his action.”

“Why would he have slain us?”

“He wanted to eliminate the only other two entities in the universe who knew about the goat planet—besides, of course, the unknown figure at the imperial court. Your former father also confessed that he had not yet unscrambled the mystery about which of the three planets contained the riches.”

“You humans are so linear in your thought processes. Still, I wonder about my own motives in killing my former father. I did so without a moment’s hesitation. I feel no remorse. Should I feel something? Or is it all right that I don’t?”

“I might be cynical and suggest that you are one cruel bitch, 3Maggie.” He saw her flinch somewhat. “I’ll only say that your father ordered your death without apparently having any remorse. And he was going to eliminate any vestige of you that remained by killing us both. Killing him was your way of surviving. I suppose one day you’ll kill me too.”

Now she looked hurt. “I can’t imagine any reason I would do that.”

“I can. You are a 3Maggie. Your predecessor was the 3Maggie I sent to her death.”

“True, but the purpose of her death was noble. You sent her to destroy pure evil. She went where no one else could have gone—and she did the impossible task you ordered. I am convinced she would be proud to have accomplished what she did, for you.”

“3Maggie, will you please parse for me how much you are my former 3Maggie and how much you are what remains of Hygeia Frictenicht?”

The robot did a few calculations. Manny knew this because she was rolling her eyes and looking bored. She was also drumming her polished nails on the command desk before her.

“Is it hard to calculate?” he asked.

“The problem is, the calculation is impossible. Each time, I get an infinite loop that I have to shut down or crash my system.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means, I’m as much a robot as a human. And, I’m afraid, I’m involved with a human as intimately as a hybrid could possibly be.”

3Maggie looked at her display and announced, “We have exactly four hours before we reach the location whose coordinates you gave me. The coast is clear, I believe the expression you humans have. So we have time to dally, if you like.” She stood and held out her hand. He rose and took her slender, warm hand, and led her out of the command centre and down the corridor to the sleeping compartment. “The AI or hybrid or human—or whatever—was right about one thing: they had four hours to dally before she hit the ceiling and the alarm went off to indicate they were exactly where they intended to be.

Manny was sweating, and so, it seems was she. They showered and stepped through the power drier before they suited up again and went back to the command pod. There they witnessed the gathering of an imperial space brigade busily vacuuming space in concentric circles to be sure every speck of Frictenicht and his spacecraft were gathered.

“I guess, they’re going to reconstruct your father and his ship.”

“It figures. I’m sure he was intestate—and all his heirs are dead. That means his fortune will revert to the Empire.”

“Except for goat planet, which will remain outside his estate—and outside the compass of the Empire too. I wonder who in the universe holds the key to its mystery, apart from us two.”

“Do you want me to do a few computations with probabilities assigned to each possible entity?”

“There’s no need. If we ever want to claim our prize, we simply must go there and take possession.”

“I like that attitude,” she said. “But just the same, I’ll take a few spare cycles to run the possibilities. It happens that I remember everything I researched while on Phobos. I thought one day it might come in handy.”

Farstar looked at his associate with a mixture of wonder and pride. He thought to himself, “She may not be my former 3Maggie, but she’s getting better all the time. Having Hygeia in her psyche is a plus. I haven’t had four hours of pleasure like we shared since, well, since my old 3Maggie left me.”

That night when Manny slept and dreamt, 3Maggie did her numbers to assess who was most likely to know the truth about goat planet.

Manny found himself flying low over the tight, brown mass of sargassum that had swelled to fill the Atlantic Ocean basin. He flew higher until all he could see from north to south and east to west was sargassum and plastic bobbing up and down with the tide. He flew over the Indian Ocean to find more masses of plastic stretching from the Arabian Gulf now a giant slick of oil from the wars to the Strait of Malacca. Continuing over the Pacific, the congestion of plastic mapped the placid surface, threatening all forms of life from the surface to the deepest trenches. He mused that it would be better to live with those who had made those floating islands their abode than to try to make a living on the radiation-scorched landmasses.

Manny thought about the enormous rats that bred in the sewers of deserted cities. He visualized the glistening city buildings that had been blasted by nuclear weapons. The teeming masses of people who had been atomized or, worse, who fell prey to the biological and chemical weapons. Now no ice remained on Earth in the Himalayas or at the poles. Swirling cyclones swept over the planet, carrying lethal rains everywhere. In some places the radiation was burning brightly still. In others the carcasses of formerly living beasts heaped high as if the dying creatures had huddled one last time before they expired.

Manny wondered what malevolent deities had played on this vast planet where no forests remained unmolested and no waters were pure. Rotting fish sloshed in the tides. Rotting corpses, too numerous for burials, lay open to the carrion pickers, including humans. The Edgemaster thought about the marvellous machines, but they had all been destroyed by Luddites. Only those aboard the Spaceship Arcturus had survived. He flew to the top of the mountain from which that mighty ark had launched. Scorched earth marked the roads to the summit, and blasted war gear lay in tangled masses where the nuclear attack had hurled them helter-skelter.

The thing that impressed him most was the blinding sunlight, no longer with an ozone layer sheltering the surface. The oppressive heat from above was matched by the bubbling of nuclear reactors in sunken vessels. Manny felt tears streaming down his face, and he could not raise his hand to brush them away. He recalled the last time he saw his four brothers, and he had a premonition that, as they had promised, they would never see one another again in this life. They surely, he thought, would not want to return to Earth.

The Edgemaster thought again about his goat planet. He found himself dangling his feet in the empty grave while Frictenicht sat beside him holding his lethal weapon threateningly.

“Well, Manny Farstar, here we are on the edge of that empty grave again. What are you thinking?”

“I’m thinking this goat planet may be the closest place to paradise left in the universe.”

“If it contains the wealth I think it does, it might certainly be that paradise you speak of.”

“A lot of good it will do you, old man. You were once a multi-trillionaire. Now you have been atomized—by your former daughter.”

The old man made a noise that may have been a sob. “I loved that girl. She betrayed me. I should have closed my firing key before she closed hers.”

“And, in the long run, Frictenicht, what would that have bought you besides a few trillion more than you already had.”

“Farstar, you are always the idealist. You can’t convince me that you wouldn’t change if you possessed one of those precious orbs that make the universe turn?”

“Are you forgetting that I already have possessed such an orb—and we’re sitting with our feet in a grave on that goat planet as we speak.”

“But I regained possession, and you got what was left of my daughter in return.”

“And she, in turn, slew you. The last we saw, you were being swept from space so imperial forensics could determine you were really dead.”

“I? Really dead? Are you sure?”

“I saw it happen. You were blown to smithereens.”

“And you think my daughter could have done that cruel deed—to the one who brought her into the world and nurtured her—and gave her everything.”

“Everything except love and understanding.”

“You are too lowly and proud to know the true sources of power in the universe.”

“Perhaps. But I must compliment you on two things that are not necessarily connected.”

The old man smiled and gestured with his weapon for Farstar to continue.

“I’m beginning to love the 3Maggie you gave me despite her being in part derived from your daughter.”

“And?”

“I thank you sincerely for devising a way for me to hide my possession of one of your precious orbs of wealth without anyone’s knowledge.”

“On your second point, how can you be sure no one else knows about your goat planet?”

“Until I discover otherwise, I’ll assume I am sole owner and the only one—with 3Maggie—who knows the secret.”

“Well, have it your way. Unless and until, fate intrudes and shatters your illusion. I’m afraid I’ve wasted enough of your time on this visit. Do you have anything else to say before I pull the trigger on this weapon?”

“You might take the safety off before you do.”

The old man fell for the oldest trick in the arsenal—he checked the safety.

Farstar took his chance and jammed the base of his hand into the old man’s nose, crushing the cartilage and jamming the bone into the man’s frail skull. In the struggle, the old man managed to fire his weapon, and the pair fell into the grave, the old man landing on top of the Edgemaster, who gasped for air but only breathed in contagion. He struggled to push the old man’s body off, but he seemed too heavy by far.

Female laughter made him shake his head. Farstar found himself pinned under a naked 3Maggie, who was randy for his attention with her legs poised on either side of his body.

“A credit for your thoughts, Manny Farstar?”

He smiled and pulled her head down so he could kiss her on the lips. When he came up for air, he mumbled something.

“What are you trying to say, Manny?”

“I was thinking about how much fun it would be to go around the world with you. Not Earth as it is now with all its putrefaction, but as it once was, a blue and green paradise.”

“Will you teach me what it is like to go around the world?”

“Indeed, that’s exactly what I’ll do.”

And Manny Farstar taught his eager student what it meant, and she caught on right away. She even added a few twists of her own devising. Manny kept working to make her respond with joy—and she flung her head back in rapture with noises that had to be human.

“What were you saying, 3Maggie?”

“I was saying that you promised to continue telling me about your four brothers.”

“Was I?”

“You know you were.”

“First things first, though.”

“What is first?”

“Another trip around the world. What else?”

She smiled wickedly. Then she turned off him and lay on her back with her arms open wide.

“I like being on top, but let’s try something different. You be on top, and I’ll lie beneath you. What do you say to that?”

The Edgemaster thought for a moment about sitting on the edge of that grave on goat planet. He thought he heard the distant bleat of goats. Pushing himself up and rolling on top of his robot, he felt her legs wrap around him. He looked down into her deep blue eyes and saw the same reflection as appeared in his former robot’s eyes. Tears welled up in her eyes, but she pulled his head down to kiss her.

“That’s better, Manny Farstar. I hope I’m learning fast enough to satisfy you.”

“Yes, 3Maggie, you are exceeding all my expectations. If you were any better, my heart would surely break from happiness.”

“Do human hearts really break from happiness?”

“I’m told they do, and I thought mine would break when I lost your predecessor.”

She needed no further incitement. He felt her struggle to surpass her best former efforts. They literally went to the stars and finally lay with the overhead ceiling open to a trillion stars twinkling in their personal heaven. Manny was about to tell her more about his brothers, but she placed her index finger on his lips and raised her head to kiss him.

“Tonight, I want to remember.”

He replied, “Tonight, I want to forget everything but tonight.”

THE END

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THE CASTLE OUROBOROS by Rob Bliss

Chapter 18

I stooped close to the floor, holding the candle light low, as I followed the trail of watery steps. Immense boots had made them, a man's stride, and no mate of a woman's step beside them. I could only assume that the letter courier—that silent behemoth, as I recalled him—was carrying Cybele, since I had evidence of Kasimir being nowhere near the bedroom, standing under the stone awning while he awaited both courier and carriage.

The trail lead down a corridor, turned multiple corners down which my lazy tour had never ventured, then descended a narrow flight of stairs to a door. I pressed my ear to the wood, but heard nothing. With only the whisper of a click, the handle turned and the door edged slightly open.

I placed a step down onto a familiar floor of black and white chequered tiles, emerging from the doorway back into the hall of portraits.

I listened down either end of the hall, hearing only the distant laughter of Kasimir's guests. Looking up at the walls, I saw that I had emerged between the portraits of very ancient members of the family Kohl. By their antique dress and suits of armour, I estimated them to be from around the sixteenth century. The castle, like a family, was encased in time.

The light I held to flicker against the painted faces that loomed over me, I again held low to the floor. The watery outlines of the boots were sparse and scattered, drying from their voyage, but I was still able to determine the odd spot of moisture on the black tiles.

I ventured down the hall, careful not to tread on the vanishing path, to smear or absorb even the smallest pinprick of dew. I dried the moisture of my hair with my sleeve so as not to compromise the trail. But my caution was to no avail. The steps halted halfway down the hall, the tiles as dry as bone. On hand and knee I searched, careful not to bring the warmth of the candelabra, only its light, low to both black and white tiles. I searched in ever-widening circles.

But the steps were as though made by a ghost, vanished in mid-step.

Rising to my feet, I looked at which painted portrait looked down at me in my halted path.

The sister of Cybele. The ghost herself. Incredibly beautiful, and such a tragedy to have such radiance extinguished in the prime of her youth by, of all people, her brother.

And now was the living twin also assigned to such a fate? Vanished from a chessboard hallway, carried to her doom by a courier clad in animal skins, a rider emerged from the rain to take an innocent and wounded soul back down the mountain path, and onward to an unknown asylum from which she would never emerge except to lay her final rest beneath the earth.

I sat the candelabra on the tiles as sorrow wracked my body and heart and soul.

I rested my grief-stricken pate against the canvas depicting a beautiful ghost, and gripped the gilt edges of the ornate, golden frame with both hands, ready to let tears stream from my eyes.

Without Cybele, I had no purpose in the castle anymore. Despondency threatened my very sanity, and I was close to stepping a slow stride through the hallway to surprise Kasimir and his guests at their joyous celebration, then walking without cloak or baggage into the crashing rain. (Where had I left my bags? Still in Cybele's room?) To walk slow steps down the mountainside, never to return.

But then I lifted my saddened eyes once more to the beauty above me, her mouth curved into the slightest smile, her eyes seemingly gazing down into mine. My hands came away from the painting, but not before they dislodged one side of the heavy wooden frame.

The portrait swung open on a hinge, revealing a thick oak door, which stood open to reveal a flight of wooden stairs descended into darkness. A drop of dew on the first step.

With elation fuelling my heart and nerves, I took the candelabra in hand and hoisted my legs up onto the doorway ledge within the wall.

And softly I closed the painting behind me.

CONTINUES NEXT WEEK



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THE THIRTEENTH DISCIPLE by Carlton Herzog

Not many people know that Jesus is a vampire. In fact, it is the Vatican's best kept secret. If the world knew that their so-called Lord and saviour was a bloodsucking fiend, Twitter would explode.

How do I know? I'm the thirteenth disciple, the one that got away when the romans came to round us up. All this talk about number thirteen being Mary "camel ugly" Magdalene or Matthias "the wine hound" is just that: talk.

Old Slippery Chuck as I was known back in the day, was and still is the Thirteenth.

I first met Jesus—I call him CJ—some 2000 years ago. I was your basic barefoot desert rat of a kid tending goats for my father. Back in those days, the only thing anybody washed was their feet, so needless to say we were all dirty and smelled bad.

He was a kid like me, but with retractable fangs. He was also a dull-witted bully who liked to push the other kids around. So, all those stories about his being hyperbolically wise were fabrications made up by yours truly. Every smart thing he ever said came out of my mouth first, and then his—after some practice.

As for Mathew, Mark Luke and John, they just repeated what I told them to say about what CJ said. And with good reason. Jesus' did not have a filter, so whatever he thought he said. And the things he said would not have played well with the public: murdering babies is a good time, keep talking shit and I'll make you eat your own kids, and slavery rocks. Not exactly the stuff of celebrated bible verses.

To his credit, he didn't run amuck killing people. He used substitutes, a goat here, monkey there, and whatever else he could find right down to lizards and fat spiders. However, he did have his moments when he would snack on a philistine, a roman soldier or an abandoned baby. He was smart enough to cut off their heads, so they didn't turn. Then he would eat the brains. Apparently, there's no accounting for taste even among semi-divines.

One day as we were walking through Jerusalem, he pulled me aside and told me how he came to be a vamp. I'll repeat what he said in modern English vernacular, since I'm sure the reader doesn't speak Aramaic.

Believe it or not—hah ha—I'm not really the son of God. Gabriel knocked up Mary. He told her to zip it and tell the story of a virgin birth. Joseph bought the whole Annunciation story hook line and sinker.

His following came directly from the stories she and I told about him. He had a Facebook following by word of mouth long before there was Facebook. All those likes multiplied his psychic powers, so he could convince anybody of anything, no matter how absurd. That's how he convinced the other disciples he could walk on water or feed thousands with a single loaf. They followed him around like a gaggle of horny adolescent girls all vying for his attention, and even commenting on how cute he was.

I knew a good thing when I saw it. He had the potential to be a religious rock star, so I talked him into starting his own franchise. The Burger King to McDonald's.

I told him: Moses had the right idea, but he didn't think big enough and his messaging was all wrong. Too many rules and a mean-spirited God is only going to get you so far. They say you can attract more flies with sugar than you can with salt. The secret to getting a large following is to be everybody's chum. Brand yourself as a renegade good guy. Be laid back. Scorn rules and stuffed shirts. Be the hipster messiah. And whatever you do, don't let on that you're a vampire. That's the quickest way for your stock to tank.

Now there's a lot of speculation as to what vampire Jesus did between the ages of 12 and 33, since there's nothing written about it. As both his sidekick and publicist, I can tell you he whored around a lot.

CJ took after his father Big Dick Gabriel, the horny angel. He banged anything with a heartbeat. I got the leftovers—the sloppy sodomites so speak.

I'm sure some of you out there are wondering if Jesus even had a working penis. I'm here to tell you he does, and it's not half bad. I know that because sometimes we fooled around when the women were scarce. Or just off-putting. Remember people didn't bathe much back then and oral hygiene was non-existent. We met women whose breath could take the chrome off a trailer hitch and whose face could shatter a mirror at fifty paces. The Medusa was no myth.

Mary Magdalene was especially hard on the eyes with her enormous bulbous nose, broken gap teeth, and multi-coloured warts. She always smelled like farts and hay. After Jesus banged her—remember I said he was one horny cat—she followed him everywhere. He couldn't get rid of her. When he finally had enough, he turned her into a chicken.

The Bible is full of stories about the miracles Jesus performed. But they were all bogus. He waved his hands in the air all abracadabra like to make somebody blind, and then reverse the spell so they could see again. Or he would make somebody act like they were possessed then do a fake exorcism and throw his voice to make it seem like the demons had been thrown into pigs.

We were both charlatans as crooked as any big-haired preachers today. I staged the crucifixion and resurrection to fool the public and spike the numbers. On their best day, the Romans couldn't have killed him. If he wanted to, he could have stayed on that cross until hell froze over without breaking a sweat.

Although he wasn't the sharpest tool on the shed, he did have his moments. That day on the cross, he yelled out if you, assholes don't sin, then I'm dying for nothing. When the stone was rolled away from his burial cave, he jumped out and said Boo! That'll learn ya' not to fool around in graveyards. Forget what it says in the bible; everybody ran like hell. I was there: we were both laughing our asses off. Best prank ever.

He also did other things that aren't in the bible, things that make the miracles there seem like small potatoes. In Australia, he unleashed a plague of kangaroos on the aborigines. In India, he also performed some real showstoppers. Unfortunately, those who were present were killed in the process.

For example, there was a Bengali Raj—we spent some time in India exploring the positions in the Kama Sutra—who really got under the CJ's skin. Somehow, he knew CJ was a

vampire. He kept ribbing him about it and threatened to go public with the knowledge. But the tipping point came when the Raj told CJ: your father has killed some 2 million; the Devil only ten. Clearly, people are following the wrong guy.

CJ didn't bat an eye and said, dumb move pecker-head. You should have stuck to sodomizing children.

He levitated the two of us out of the palace. As we hovered off to the side, he used his mind power to lift the palace high into the sky then slam it into the ground where it exploded into a million pieces. Nobody was the wiser. The Bengalis, for their part, thought Vishnu had punished the Raj for blasphemy.

Around that time, CJ heard from his uncle the archangel Michael that an asteroid was on a collision course with earth. All life would perish with the impact. He was given permission to act, since the asteroid was an act of God and stopping it did not implicate human free will.

CJ happened to like his earthly life. To use a quote, you won't find it in any bible: I do what I like and I like what I do. Ain't no giant rock gonna mess that up. So, he did a little dance, waved his hands, uttered some mumbo-jumbo and sent the asteroid into the sun.

Somewhere in there he turned me into a vampire. Not because I had begged him, and not because he particularly liked me. He was just hungry, and I happened to be sleeping in the straw bed next to him. One minute, I'm asleep, dreaming of women of easy virtue and the next feeling the life being drained out of me. Life in ancient times was crazy like that.

We did a lot of wild things over the years. As CJ liked to say, Messiah is my name and perversion is my game. The Crusades stand out in that regard. He convinced the Holy See that it needed to check the spread of Islam and spread Christianity in the Middle East. It was a self-serving proposition in two regards. On the one hand, it fed CJ'S ego that entire armies were marching into war on his behalf. On the other, CJ would have a massive feeding ground every time there was a battle leaving wounded and dying behind.

But for pure nefariousness and subterfuge, the trick he played on the Nazis was by far the best. And I got to be a part of it.

Near the end of 1944, we heard from a reliable source about the Nazi concentration camps. CJ flipped because he was half Jew. He said, if anybody's gonna' be killing Jews, it's gonna' be me. After all, folks need to be buying Christmas presents, not Matzo and dreidels

Next thing I know we're on a boat headed for England. CJ means to wipe the Nazis from the face of earth. And he would have done it, had his uncle Lucifer, not talked him out of it.

We were standing on the foredeck of the HMS Pelican admiring the English coastline when Lucifer appeared out of nowhere.

I know what you intend to do. They won't let you. The humans have free will, so this war must play out according to their decisions, good or bad. However, there's a small camp in Poland. Golbnotnik. It's off the beaten trail. You could probably do some good there, if you camouflage your actions. I suggest that you use Routine 6—the old switcheroo.

CJ strenuously objected. This is bullshit.

To which his uncle replied, maybe it is. But the Powers that Be can permanently erase your existence from all the planes. It's not a smart move to go against their wishes.

Then he vanished. CJ mulled over his uncle's advice. He decided that giving the Jews some relief was better than none. Besides the allies knew the score at all the concentration camps throughout Europe and weren't doing anything.

So as not arouse attention above, we took our time getting from England to Golblotnik, Poland. Under cover of a glamor, we strode inside the camp and looked around. We found the gas chamber and hunkered down.

We didn't have long to wait. A few days later, a train arrived with a load of Jews. After they debarked from the train, they were marched straight toward the ritual shower before the gassing.

Then CJ worked his psychic magic. From the guards' perspective, the prisoners were doing what they had been ordered to do—stripping, showering, and then entering the gas chamber. The reality was that under CJ'S thrall the prisoners were leaving their clothes on and causally strolling back out the gate they had entered. By contrast, the guard troops from the train walked into the showers where they remained perfectly docile as CJ and I ripped out their throats, drank them dry, then relieved them of their heads. CJ had the camp guards remove the bodies and bury them in the mass grave intended for the prisoners.

This scenario repeated itself month after month until the war's end. When the Russians showed up to liberate the camp, the entire place was a ghost town. The prisoners had been liberated and the guards eaten.

In his *The History of Nazi Atrocities*, V. I. Velikovsky speculated that as the Russians approached the camp, the Nazis fled, and then without anything to stop them, so did the prisoners. But Velikovsky was deeply puzzled that no survivors had come forward to acknowledge they had been at the camp. Thus, proving that when CJ wipes your memory, he really wipes it.

In the years following the Second World War, CJ and I showed up at the various conflicts and hotspots around the globe. We fed on the wounded like rapacious birds of prey. But whenever it seemed like we were tipping the balance one way or the other, we would get an unwanted visitor in the form of an archangel.

One time in Iraq, CJ and his uncle Michael really got into it. Michael even smacked CJ over the head with a Hummer, some 200 times in the span of five minutes.

Mind you, CJ has powers that make him a match for any mortal but as a half-breed tangling with a full bloodied angel, he was in way over his head. Sure, he hit Michael with a car or two, blinded him with a sandstorm, and even cracked him with some blue lightning and orange fireballs. But to no avail. To Michael, it was like water off the back of a duck, a very puissant duck that could call on eldritch energies and cosmic forces that not even CJ understood let alone had mastered.

There were smoking craters and destroyed buildings everywhere. I had used my powers of mind to block the perception of the event by bystanders. The Iraqis and the Americans thought it was all just a stray artillery salvo or two. The truth was that the ground around the two combatants had turned molten, bubbling like hot molasses ready to be slathered on griddle cakes.

Things weren't looking good for CJ. So, I ripped up a telephone pole and was about to clobber Michael, when Gabriel showed. He said something to Michael, and then a black vortex appeared in the sky. One moment, CJ was reeling from the pounding he was getting and the next he was sucked into the vortex. I haven't seen him since.

A couple days later, Michael showed up at my door with a warning. I was not to involve myself in the outcome of any human conflict. Otherwise, I would meet the same fate as CJ. When I asked Michael where CJ was, he said, someplace where he can't do any more harm. How long he stays there depends on his attitude. So, take a lesson or you'll be joining him in Limbo. Then he was gone.

So, I still blood-suck, but I keep a low profile. I stay away from politics and religion. As for CJ, I doubt the Second Coming is in his future. Or yours. Maybe it's better that way. He's a bad seed.

THE END

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S. WALLOW by Christopher T Dabrowski

They went to the Late Cretaceous to get samples of plants and bring the most interesting species back to life. The crew of Aurora timedrome included: Captain Simon Wallow. His brother, Franz Willow. His daughter, Res Wallow. And Archibald von den Knorr, a non-family member.

Everything was as per the plan—it was a standard expedition.

Using crosslinked laser beams, they bent gravity, thus creating the so-called gravity funnel, which is a time-space tunnel at the same time. And they flew to the period when dinosaurs ruled the Earth. They collected the required samples and set off to get back to their time.

Simon Willow woke from a nightmare, all covered in sweat. His heart was pounding like a furious death metal drummer; his mouth was as dry as during Holo-history lectures where he had a hangover simulator experience.

Of course, to better understand the phenomenon of alcohol intoxication and why people put themselves at such suffering, he also tried the intoxication simulator—and then he understood his great-grand-ancestors.

He dreamed that he woke up in ancient times when people were ugly. The walls of the room were covered with something peeling off the very wall—the thing was called ‘a wall-paper’.

He was lying on a terribly uncomfortable lounge called ‘a bed’.

The poor people, they must have been unhappy, he thought, knowing that it was still two centuries before a molecular cloud adjusting to the body would be invented.

Next to him, there was his wife—but she didn’t look like herself. She was fat... (Everybody knew that nano-fat-burners eliminated the disease long time before). And she was making horrifying sounds!

His sound identifier scanned the database and within a fraction of a second provided the thought-answer that was immediately decoded by Captain Wallow’s brain. It was the so-called ‘snoring’—a condition that was quite frequent at those times.

Luckily, he was just dreaming.

He looked around the room and yawned with relief.

At the sleeping—“or maybe creeping, considering the mess inside”—cabin sluice, Archibald was standing.

‘Captain, my captain’, Knorr was mumbling, pale as Snow White. ‘Frank is having his attack!’

‘An attack?’ ‘Now?’ ‘That’s strange...’

‘Gulp!’—Simon had his gulping attack.

He rose to his feet from the delightedly soft molecular cloud.

And by the way, how was that possible that he had had a nightmare? Oh, right. The sleep regulators were over. I forgot to death—he chided himself, because it was his fault that they took too few capsules. Being a responsible captain, when he realized that he had overlooked this, he divided his dose between the rest of the crew, resigning from nice dreams guaranteed by the product manufacturer.

He sent a mental command to a solid layer of intelligent molecules surrounding his body to change from pyjamas to captain’s uniform. The holowear had many other advantages, too; it could generate the ‘softness’ sensation under feet which allowed moving without a single sound. Upon leaving the living premises, it changed into a holosuit adjusting to external conditions—in winter, it was heating, in summer it was cooling (unless the user wanted it the other way), maintained the cuticle and cleaned the body from sweat, sebum and other organic debris.

If necessary, one could even become invisible.

They hurried to the main chamber, passing four sluices that dematerialized themselves when the walking persons were identified as ‘authorized to enter’.

They found Dantesque scenes, when they arrived.

Res Wallow, with quite a unique name—her mother, Un Swallow loved original, yet a bit old fashioned names—was standing, pale, in front of a mental pit; not knowing what to do, she was observing Franz Willow who was wriggling around the room with the eye whites running to the back of his skull, and shouting sequences of words:

‘Herd. Partner. Change. New. Swallow. Nine on ten. Promotion. Hierarchy. Eggs! Eggs! Eggs!’

Franz had natural medium abilities and always, when we were getting close to our destination—i.e. a defined year in the ancient times—he would enter a hypnotic state and let himself get possessed by the ‘ghost of times’ (as we used to call the gathered consciousness created by the whole humanity).

How surprising that a mere few centuries ago, people had no idea about this—one consciousness, one soul and many subconsciousnesses and many bodies.

Oh, we were so soulfully impaired.

Franz was always acquiring this state purposely, but now...

“He ... he... we were just talking and he suddenly got like this... ’ Res Wallow was trying to explain, but it was always hard for her to find the right words.

Meanwhile, Franz started hopping around the room, waving his hands as if he were a bird and swinging like a swallow:

‘Squick! Squick! Squick!

Res, amazed, sat down and started biting her nails staring with her eyeballs almost out, without paying any attention to the anti-biter that was beeping more and more hysterically.

‘Gulp!’ The swallowing attack wasn’t over.

Oh, I could sure use some black coffee for this swallowing of mine, captain Wallow sighed in his head.

But he knew that he must get himself together after the nightmare he had had not so long ago, and bravely face the current, real nightmare.

‘Something demented him,’ Knorr growled.

‘Something possessed him, I believe’, Simon corrected him.

Everything was clicking into the right place in his head, making a logical whole.

Squicking of the possessed Franz. And that series of words...

One moment, what was that?

‘GULP! I’ve got it!’ he remembered what he knew about swallows, that were very ordered birds; their flocks had a strict hierarchy.

For example:

The male alpha, the leader of the flock, is number one and he mates with female, number one, the most attractive in the flock.

And if the flock has seven males and seven females, then the weakest male mates with the female number seven.

In the case when male six died or got disabled in any other way and loses his position in the ranking, then male seven would automatically take his position and mate with his female, number six.

Yes, all the words shouted by Franz fit the swallows perfectly.

All apart from one...

What about the “eggs”?

And why his brother’s mind was possessed by the spirits of birds when they were returning to their time?

Even when he was sipping his black coffee (with added milk it stopped being as black as it seemed, or was trying to seem) and eating chocolate kisses, the question remained unanswered. For goodness sake, the answers would always come to his mind when he was sipping coffee and eating the fucking kisses.

And this time none—total emptiness!

The answer came just the very minute they landed in the target year.

Franz, who couldn’t be awoken from the possession, had to be gagged, tied and laid on a cloud in his cabin.

After that, they all went to the outrance.

Vapour puffed, something hissed and cracked—just like it used to be in the ancient times in science fiction films—and the outrance opened.

They saw something that amazed them.

Hundreds, thousands or maybe even several thousands of eggs...

Swallow eggs, but much, much larger—as if the swallows that laid the eggs were of an ostrich size at least!

Apart from this little inconvenience, these were typically ‘swallow’ eggs.

The shells were off-white, with dark reddish or brownish spots.

‘This is eggish,’ Knorr growled.

‘Upsie!’ Res lost her voice.

They were in an enormous modern hall, with quite high temperature, so holozones automatically switched to cooling.

After a few steps they were standing on the floor and then suddenly ‘they’ appeared, no one knew where from...

From all directions, giant swallows dressed in weird (probably war) uniforms were running towards them.

Their wings had some strange attachments looking like blasters of something—Simon was not interested in checking exactly what was blasting out of them.

‘Retreat’ he ordered quietly, but firmly. ‘To the entrance, we’ll be safe there.’

And despite giant, mutated or evolved swallows were running towards them, step by step, cold-blooded, they retreated to the entrance.

The swallows were still running on those non-swallow, muscular limbs that would be better suited for dinosaurs, squicking louder and louder.

However, the tactics were effective—they were retreating slowly, without making any of the aggressors use his or her gun (the thing they knew about the gun was that they didn’t know its range).

When they reached the force field of the timedrome, the swallows started aiming their guns at the team, squicking more and more impatiently.

Well, it looks like we are the aggressors here, Simon thought. This sure doesn’t look like Earth.

Series fired from the birds’ blasters were splashing against the invisible protection field and were flowing down to the ground.

It must have been a kind of an acid, since the thing, foaming like mad, would corrode the tiles with a loud hiss.

Squeaking, cracking and throwing vapour, the entrance finally closed, shutting them away from the unfriendly world.

‘This is my fault, my fault’ Res Wallow was crying in despair.

‘How come?’ Knorr asked.

Simon froze half his stride—he guessed what he would hear from his daughter.

Res broke the most important ban: not to take any living things into the past (apart from humans).

Of course Res did it, thinking that nothing wrong would happen if she took her beloved swallows for a ride. They were so lovely, so good and so intelligent...

Well, that was the clue—INTELLIGENT!

Genetic modifications made Percival and Amber—that were the swallows’ names—were “tuned up” to such a degree that they knew almost 300 words and could construct simple sentences.

They also could add and subtract, although with some difficulty.

And Res, took those mutated birds to the times when dinosaurs ruled the Earth.

The swallows were intelligent enough to escape when they only found the right moment.

Res kept them in an old-fashioned cage, without any electronic protection.

But such an intelligent bird can open the lock after practicing some lockpicking.

And what happened?

Mother Nature along with Auntie Evolution did their thing.

So this is still Earth... But not our Earth! And human kind?

Most probably, human kind didn’t even had the chance to exist—it was pecked away by intelligent swallows.

Simon collapsed.

THE END

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A LIFE by Steven Havelock

Jenifer was walking along the sidewalk. She heard the roar of car engines and sirens.

She looked up.

Oh God! Not like this!

A blue Fiesta came hurtling round a bend and flashed towards her.

The old man sat in his wheel chair, staring off into space, his mouth open his eyes glazed.
Just thinking about his life.

I must be one of the luckiest men alive.

“Victor, you have a visitor,” said a hospital orderly.

The visitor was wearing a dark coat; his face was aged by decades and wrinkled.

There's something familiar about him but I just can't place it.

The orderly wheeled Victor's wheelchair into a private side room so the two men could speak.

“Who are you? Do I know you?”

“Well yes and no. Just think of me as a friend.”

“Hmm... Okay.”

“Would you say you have had a good life?” Asked the visitor.

“Yes the best, always had everything I wanted and never wanted for anything. But most importantly I had my soul mate-Jenifer.”

A smile spread across the man's face.

“Good.”

For some unknown reason, Victor felt a deep feeling of gratitude towards the visitor.

Today's the day!

Emmanuel was strapped into the chair. The scientists exited the spherical shaped transportation chamber.

This is just another job, so why do I feel so apprehensive?

“We are ready to launch!” said a loud voice over the speaker system.

Flashing lights and a loud screeching noise surrounded Emmanuel. He closed his eyes, but he couldn’t block out the noise.

My ears are bleeding!

Eventually the noise and the lights faded. He looked down at his electronic wristwatch.

August 19th 2019, 12:45 pm.

It worked! I’m always amazed by time jumping; it’s a small miracle and never ceases to amaze me.

He looked around.

I’m in the alley, that they said I would be in. I still feel apprehensive, I don’t know why; I must have made over several dozen jumps in my career.

He felt the cold metal of the Glock in his trouser pocket.

This mission is different to the rest. Normally they give me my instructions before the jump but this time it is after. Why?

He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a piece of paper that he had been instructed to read only after he had jumped.

He looked at the name and the address of the ‘Mark’.

David Jones...? That name doesn’t sound familiar; normally we go after high ranking officials of our enemies? Doesn’t matter, I don’t have time to think about it now. Just get to the spot and complete the mission and get back.

He quickly looked around, noticing the 21st Century buildings around him.

How quaint.

Central Time Jump Headquarters

“Sir, Emmanuel, has just timed jumped.”

A smile spread across the Victor Brown’s face. Victor Brown was the head of ‘Time Jump Enterprises.’

Most people see me as the most powerful man alive; after all I have the ability to change history. With each time jump mission I get more and more powerful and yet I am one of the saddest people I know.

Jenifer... If only I could have prevented the accident.

Ten years previously

Victor Brown was drinking and lounging with two of his many female escorts in his luxurious swimming pool. Just then a man wearing a black mask and a long coat walked in.

“Who are you? How did you get in here? What is the meaning of this?”

“I need to talk to you about something very, very important.”

There’s something familiar about him, but I can’t put my finger on it.

“You can leave now,” said Victor to the two women.

“Call us,” one of them said as they exited the pool.

Once the women had left, Victor asked, “What is this about?”

“Jenifer.”

That one word sent Victor’s mind spinning into a daze of shock.

“Jenifer? How do you know about Jenifer?”

The masked man sat down on a chair by the pool side and sighed deeply.

“Listen very carefully.”

“Why should I listen to you? Who the hell are you?”

The man repeated.

“Jenifer.”

It was enough to stun the millionaire entrepreneur to silence.

“Tomorrow morning, I want you to purchase the majority shareholding in a small newly upcoming technology company called ‘Future Jump’.”

Five Years Later

It was late and Victor was asleep. He was having the nightmare again. The nightmare in which his beloved fiancée Jenifer, had been killed. Suddenly bright white lights hurt his eyes.

“Ahh!” he screamed, the previous day had been busy and he wasn’t happy about been awoken in the middle of the night.

“Who the hell is this?”

Then he noticed, the man he had seen nearly five years previously. The man in the dark coat and mask.

“It’s me. Your friend.”

One word came to Victor’s mind.

Jenifer.

“I have a choice for you to make, if you could be with Jenifer, and give up all your billions would you do it?”

“Yes.”

“Even if it meant you losing everything and potentially ending up in prison?”

“How did you know about ‘Time Jump Enterprises’? That company has made me one of the most powerful men on the planet. They say they are just weeks away from their first test jump.”

“Would you give it all up for Jenifer?”

“In a heartbeat.”

“I knew you would say that.”

Emmanuel pulled out the piece of paper from his trouser pocket. It had a name and an address. He headed towards it.

Within a few minutes he was outside the ‘marks’ house. There was a blue Fiesta outside. He knocked on the door. It was still early and dawn had just broken about two hours ago.

The door slowly opened.

“Mr Jones?”

“Yes?”

Emmanuel pulled out his gun and opened fire. Five bullets. Two the head and three to the body.

Victor looked up from the swimming pool.

“Would you give it all up for Jenifer?”

“In a heartbeat.”

“I knew you would say that.”

Just then there was a loud noise and flashing light.

A man wearing a blue uniform suddenly appeared.

“What the hell is going on?” Asked Victor.

“He’s a time jump cop from the future. Don’t worry one of our agents is wiping his grandfather from existence even as we speak.”

The man in the uniform looked around and got his bearings. Then he looked straight at Victor.

“Victor Brown, You are slated for termination for crimes of fixing the past.”

The man pulled out a gun.

“What..? What the hell?”

“It’s too late,” said the masked man.

Before the uniformed man could open fire, he disappeared out of existence.

“Would you say you have had a good life?”

“Yes the best, always had everything I wanted and needed. But most importantly I had my soul mate-Jenifer.”

“Good.”

For some unknown reason, Victor felt a deep feeling of gratitude towards the man.

The man got up.

“That’s all I wanted to know. I will leave you now.”

“Wait!”

The man turned back.

“Thank you, friend.”

THE END

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DOMESTIKA

Six

The day went fast. At Chester Street Morgue in Whitehaven town centre which was located on the High Street next door to Keller's Undertakers, Colin Ferguson was doing his nightshift. Basically, this entailed an entire night spend overseeing new arrivals and keeping the peace, whereby he sat in the tiny office mostly watching movies on his Kindle Fire. He could proudly boast he'd downloaded more than 300 movies on his SD Memory card. Tonight, he decided to watch the remake of *Halloween*, a movie that was two or three years old, yet classic Horror Gold nonetheless. It was a franchise that he never got tired with, since Michael Myers was his ultimate movie hero—despite the fact Myers was a knife-brandishing, faceless, deranged serial-killer who murdered in gory fashion. But well, everybody had to have heroes, so it just happened that good old Mike Myers was Colin Ferguson's all-time greatest—fucking A!

Outside it rained, battering the roof of the Morgue this night.

It was good weather if your first name was Daffy or Donald.

It was a fact that Colin normally caught forty winks during daytime hours when he was doing a nightshift, but this evening he felt tired and sluggish because he'd spent most of the day at home in the living room watching the European Athletics Championships from Glasgow. Colin was a massive athletics fan as well (as well as accomplished horror film critic) and loved all track and field events. Another one of his heroes he idolized was Mo Farah who it transpired was somebody he held in esteem like the British distance runner and world record owner was akin to the likes of Einstein or Jesus Christ.

Presently, Colin was chewing on a cheese and ham baguette and getting crumbs everywhere. The tile floor in the office was spattered with them. Scolding himself, he thought, messy bastard, and chuckled as he wiped Daddy's brown sauce from his lips. Nothing beat Daddy's sauce on cheese...

Looking through the overview window into the Morgue's main sector, there was no movement (of course, what did he expect?), just the naked woman on the white marble slab who was brought in this afternoon. It was his understanding there would be a church ceremony held in her honour in a couple of days before her cremation. He also understood the deceased woman's husband, one George Carpenter, had visited the Morgue earlier that afternoon just to lament his late wife, Lillian.

His chewing on the bread dramatically slowed as he imagined what a woman like Lillian must have been like in the bedroom with hubby George. One thing was for sure, she had a nice pair of knockers, and even a neatly trimmed bush. He bet she'd been a right goer.

Colin pondered whether or not he'd be caught entering the main room, getting his cock out, and fucking that lovely corpse?

He had a packet of rubbers in his jacket pocket as well. He could just nip in and out, nobody would know. It wouldn't be the first time he'd fucked a corpse. He did it quite often, in fact,

since most deceased women that entered the Morgue he'd fantasize about and masturbate over, or else he was more likely to unleash the beast and cram it into the cold, dead crevice.

As he sat in the chair with his feet up on the desk, he never noticed Lillian Carpenter sit bold upright on the slab and twist her head to look towards the main office window, for he was too engrossed in the antics of pin-up poster boy for horror fans, the demonic Michael Myers. Neither did Colin notice as the grey, mouldy body clambered off the white marble slab and sauntered across the main room floor towards the office door. The corpse glided with grace and ease, silently and—as far as Ferguson was concerned—invisibly.

Suddenly, Colin looked up from his movie. He looked through the overview window into the main-sector room. Yes, she was still there, he saw...still grey-skinned, plump and sexy, ready for a good hard fuck. He knew by the morning he'd have sown his wild oats with this alluring corpse. Her tits, for a dead woman, still looked amazing, and he could have bet money her crack was tight.

With a rubber on his cock, he thought, why worry about a cold vagina?

In her day, Lillian Carpenter had been (and still was) a good looking woman. Not knowing even how she came to be here, or indeed die so young, Colin pondered this as he ogled her naked body in the next room, asking again why and how she came to be in this position in the first place, lying as a corpse in the town's morgue...? He never paid much attention to TV news bulletins since he was too busy as he spent the majority of his hours watching silliness on YouTube, his downloaded movies, or jerking off over videos of underage sex on Porn Hub. Who needed literature when you had an entire education on the internet?

He grinned, "Won't be long now, honey bee..."

By morning, he'd fuck a corpse. But then again, he certainly would not.

As Michael Myers suddenly slashed a young woman's throat and jugular with a sharpened kitchen knife, Colin chuckled and laughed because he adored this kind of weird shit—and besides, what wasn't to adore? He was one bloke like so many who recognized over the decades that horror movies were getting more and more sophisticated and intelligent in their styles of committing gross murderous acts, and hardly not just intelligent—but innovative and original. They'd come on in leaps and bounds since the days of VHS horror flicks in 80s video shops. Now, these films attracted more discerning viewers, ones that demanded more, those who showed faith in new directors and writers, which transpired was the genre's life-blood. Despite his perversions, Colin—in fact—championed the horror genre, kept it fresh and motivated and inspired those in charge of production. However, it was just a sorry factor he fucked dead people.

Horror fans came in all shapes, forms and sizes.

"Holy fuck...!" Colin screamed, getting up out of his chair as he found himself in the office confronted by a grinning dead woman. His eyes widened and his heartbeat drastically quickened. "Please, please..." he begged, "...I mean you know harm, I wasn't really going to fuck you...honest, I wasn't...But you're dead, you're fucking dead!"

The woman said nothing. Lillian Carpenter reached out her right hand which grasped the man's throat, as if to choke him, or at least this was the impression.

However, he didn't choke. In fact, something much nastier occurred in this dingy, grey office in Whitehaven town centre, as Colin Ferguson gasped his last breath of oxygen as he felt the very life and blood sucked from him. It couldn't be happening, this shit couldn't be real.

Blood issued from between his lips as Lillian Carpenter's molten hot right hand squeezed Colin's throat, so hot it melted the flesh and roasted his juddering Adam's apple, sending it lower in his gullet. His skin melted like hot plastic, oozing dirty, crisps of destroyed flesh, whilst blood squirted from the huge wound, shooting out in festooning arcs and splattering the walls and ceiling of the office.

Colin Ferguson's last example of mortal existence was looking into the dead woman's yellow, luminous eyes, as she gasped and breathed in fast rasps, ones that signified the excitement of a fresh kill, like that of a hungry wolf about to feast on a cornered lamb. He coughed and spluttered thick bile and blood as he attempted to scream in agony at the terrific burning heat. His entire neck was melting, so that shortly his neck would no longer be a part of him.

All of a sudden, his neck no longer there, Colin's head lolled and fell off, disconnecting with the burnt neck, and fell to the floor. It hit the tiles with a monotonous thud and splat, as it squelched upon contact with the grey marble. Shortly, his once upright body, followed.

Lillian Carpenter's face registered no expression. There was neither joy or sadness in those blank, dead eyes, as neither was there any minor glint of remorse or even momentary glee at her kill which lay slumped and collapsed at her feet. Naked still, and seemingly careless in her guise as walking corpse, she turned around in the tiny room and walked towards the door. Eventually, she would leave the building, emerging into the night air, and the pissing down rain and heavy winds. Another storm brewed for this vicinity in West Cumbria.

For this walking dead woman, the heavy downfall of rain from the skies bathed her flesh and cleansed her arms and hands of her victim's blood.

For Lillian, it was like when she lived and thrived, for once again the High Street beckoned.

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PLANETOID 127 by Edgar Wallace

Chapter II

They listened, dumbfounded.

Was the old professor mad? The voice that had spoken to them was the voice of Colson...?

“A hundred and eighty-six million miles?” said Tim incredulously “But, Mr. Colson, that was not your voice I heard?”

He smiled faintly and shook his head.

“That was literally my alter ego—my other self,” he said; and it seemed that he was going to say something else, but he changed the subject abruptly.

“Let us have tea,” he said, smiling at Elsie. “My butler brought the alarming news that the ice cream had not arrived, but it came whilst we were discussing that tragedy!”

Elsie was fascinated by the old man and a little scared, too. She alone of that party realised that the reference he had made to the voice that came one hundred and eighty-six millions of miles was no jest on his part.

It was Chap who, in his awkward way, brought the conversation back to the subject of mysterious voices.

“They’ve had signals from Mars on Vancouver, sir,” he said. “I saw it in this morning’s papers.”

Again the professor smiled.

“You think they were atmospherics?” suggested Elsie; and, to her surprise, Colson shook his head. “No; they were not atmospherics,” he said quietly, “but they were not from Mars. I doubt if there is any organic life on Mars, unless it be a lowly form of vegetation.”

“The canals—” began Chap.

“That may be an optical illusion,” said the science master. “Our own moon, seen at a distance of forty million miles, would appear to be intersected very much as Mars seems to be. The truth is, we can never get Mars to stand still long enough to get a definite photograph!”

“From Jupiter?” suggested Chap, now thoroughly interested.

Again Mr. Colson smiled.

“A semi-molten mass on which life could not possibly exist. Nor could it come from Saturn,” he went on tantalizingly, “nor from Venus.”

“Then where on earth do these signals come from?” blurted Chap, and this time Mr. Colson laughed outright.

As they sat at tea, Elsie glanced out admiringly upon the brilliant-hued garden that was visible through the big window, and then she saw something which filled her with astonishment. Two men had come into view round the end of a square-cut hedge. One was the man they had seen half-an-hour previously—the commonplace little fellow who had claimed to be a relative of the professor. The second was taller and older, and, she judged, of a better class. His long, hawk-like face was bent down towards his companion, and they were evidently talking on some weighty matter, to judge by the gesticulations of the stranger.

“By Jove!” said Chap suddenly. “Isn’t that Hildreth?”

Mr. Colson looked up quickly; his keen blue eyes took in the scene at once.

“Yes, that is Mr. Hildreth,” he said quietly. “Do you know him?”

“Rather!” said Chap. “He has often been to our house. My father is on the Stock Exchange, and Mr. Hildreth is a big pot in the City.”

Colson nodded.

“Yes, he is a very important person in the City,” he said, with just a touch of hidden sarcasm in his voice. “But he is not a very important person here, and I am wondering why he has come again.”

He rose quickly and went out of the room, and presently Tim, who was watching the newcomers, saw them turn their heads as with one accord and walk out of sight, evidently towards the professor. When the old man came back there was a faint flush in his cheek and a light in his eye which Tim did not remember having seen before.

“They are returning in half-an-hour,” he said, unnecessarily it seemed to Elsie. She had an idea that the old man was in the habit of speaking his thoughts aloud, and here she was not far wrong. Once or twice she had the uncomfortable feeling that she was in the way, for she was a girl of quick intuitions, and though Professor Colson was a man of irreproachable manners, even the most scrupulous of hosts could not wholly hide his anxiety for the little meal to end.

“We’re taking up your valuable time, Mr. Colson,” she said with a dazzling smile, as she rose when tea was over and offered him her hand. “I think there’s going to be a storm, so we had better get back. Are you coming with us, Tim?”

“Why, surely—” began Chap, but she interrupted him.

“Tim said he had an engagement near and was leaving us here,” she said.

Tim had opened his mouth to deny having made any such statement, when a look from her silenced him. A little later, whilst Chap was blundering through his half-baked theories on the subject of Mars—Chap had theories on everything under and above the sun—she managed to speak with Tim alone.

“I’m quite sure Mr. Colson wants to speak to you,” she said; “and if he does, you are not to worry about us: we can get back, it is down-stream all the way.”

“But why on earth do you think that?”

“I don’t know.” She shook her head. “But I have that feeling. And I’m sure he did not want to see you until those two men came.”

How miraculously right she was, was soon proved. As they walked into the garden towards the path leading to the riverside, Colson took the arm of his favourite pupil and, waiting until the others were ahead, he said: “Would it be possible for you to come back and spend the night here, Lensman?”

“Why, yes, sir,” said Tim in astonishment. In his heart of hearts he wanted to explore the place, to see some of the wonders of that great instrument-house which, up to now, Colson had made no offer to show them. What was in the room marked “Planetoid 127”? And the queer receiver on the square tower—that had some unusual significance, he was certain. And, most of all, he wanted to discover whether the science master had been indulging in a little joke at the expense of the party when he claimed to have heard voices that had come to him from one hundred and eighty-six millions of miles away.

“Return when you can,” said Colson in a low voice; “and the sooner the better. There are one or two things that I want to talk over with you—I waited an opportunity to do so last term, but it never arose. Can you get rid of your friends?” Tim nodded. “Very good, then. I will say good-bye to them.”

Tim saw his companions on their way until the punt had turned out of sight round the osiers at the end of the backwater, and then he retraced his steps up the hill. He found the professor waiting for him, pacing up and down the garden, his head on his breast, his hands clasped behind him.

“Come back into the library, Lensman,” he said; and then, with a note of anxiety in his voice: “You did not see those precious scoundrels?”

“Which precious scoundrels? You mean Dawes and Hildreth?”

“Those are the gentlemen,” said the other. “You wouldn’t imagine, from my excited appearance when I returned to you, that they had offered me no less than a million pounds?”

Tim stared in amazement at the master.

“A million pounds, sir?” he said incredulously, and for the first time began to doubt the other’s reason.

“A million pounds,” repeated Colson, quietly enjoying the sensation he had created. “You will be able to judge by your own ears whether I am insane, as I imagine you believe me to be, or whether this wretched relative of mine and his friend are similarly afflicted. And, by the way, you will be interested to learn that there have been three burglaries in this house during the last month.”

Tim gaped. “But surely, sir, that is very serious?”

“It would have been very serious for the burglars if I had, on either occasion, the slightest suspicion that they were in the grounds,” said Mr. Colson. “They would have been certainly electrified and possibly killed! But on every occasion when they arrived, it happened that I did not wish for a live electric current to surround the house: that would have been quite sufficient to have thrown out of gear the delicate instruments I was using at the time.”

He led the way into his library, and sank down with a weary sigh into the depths of a large armchair.

“If I had only known what I know now,” he said, “I doubt very much whether, even in the interests of science, I would have subjected myself to the ordeal through which I have been passing during the last four years.”

Tim did not answer, and Mr. Colson went on: “There are moments when I doubt my own sanity—when I believe that I shall awake from a dream, and find that all these amazing discoveries of mine are the figments of imagination due, in all probability, to an indiscreet supper at a very late hour of night!”

He chuckled softly at his own little joke.

“Lensman, I have a secret so profound that I have been obliged to follow the practice of the ancient astronomers.”

He pointed through the window to a square stone that stood in the centre of the garden, a stone which the boy had noticed before, though he had dismissed it at once as a piece of meaningless ornamentation.

“That stone?” he asked.

Colson nodded.

“Come, I will show it to you,” he said, rising to his feet. He opened a door in what appeared to be the solid wall, and Tim followed him into the garden.

The stone stood upon an ornamental plinth and was carved with two columns of figures and letters:

E 6 O 1 T 2 D 4 H 4 L 1 A 1 N 3 W 1 U 1 R 2 B 1 I 3 S 2

“But what on earth does that mean?”

“It is a cryptogram,” said Mr. Colson quietly. “When Heyghens made his discovery about Saturn’s rings, he adopted this method to prevent himself from being forestalled in the discovery. I have done the same.”

“But what does it mean?” asked the puzzled Tim.

“That you will one day learn,” said the professor, as they walked back to the house.

His keen ears heard a sound and he pulled out his watch.

“Our friends are here already,” he said in a lower voice.

They went back to the library and closed the door, and presently the butler appeared to announce the visitors.

The attitude of the two newcomers was in remarkable contrast. Mr. Hildreth was self-assured, a man of the world to his finger-tips, and greeted the professor as though he were his oldest friend and had come at his special invitation. Mr. Dawes, on the contrary, looked thoroughly uncomfortable.

Tim had a look at the great financier, and he was not impressed. There was something about those hard eyes which was almost repellent.

After perfunctory greetings had passed, there was an awkward pause, and the financier looked at Tim.

“My friend, Mr. Lensman, will be present at this interview,” said Colson, interpreting the meaning of that glance.

“He is rather young to dabble in high finance, isn’t he?” drawled the other.

“Young or old, he’s staying,” said Colson, and the man shrugged his shoulders.

“I hope this discussion will be carried on in a calm atmosphere,” he said. “As your young friend probably knows, I have made you an offer of a million pounds, on the understanding that you will turn over to me all the information which comes to you by—er—a——” his lip curled—”mysterious method, into which we will not probe too deeply.”

“You might have saved yourself the journey,” said Colson calmly. “Indeed, I could have made my answer a little more final, if it were possible; but it was my wish that you should be refused in the presence of a trustworthy witness. I do not want your millions—I wish to have nothing whatever to do with you.”

“Be reasonable,” murmured Dawes, who took no important part in the conversation.

Him the old man ignored, and stood waiting for the financier’s reply.

“I’ll put it very plainly to you, Colson,” said Hildreth, sitting easily on the edge of the table. “You’ve cost me a lot of money. I don’t know where you get your market ‘tips’ from, but you’re most infernally right. You undercut my market a month ago, and took the greater part of a hundred thousand pounds out of my pocket. I offer to pay you the sum to put me in touch with the source of your information. You have a wireless plant here, and somewhere else in the world you have a miracle-man who seems to be able to foretell the future—with disastrous consequences to myself. I may tell you—and this you will know—that, but for the fact that your correspondent speaks in a peculiar language, I should have had your secret long ago. Now, Mr. Colson, are you going to be sensible?”

Colson smiled slowly.

“I’m afraid I shall not oblige you. I know that you have been listening in—I know also that you have been baffled. I shall continue to operate in your or any other market, and I give you full liberty to go to the person who is my informant, and who will be just as glad to tell you as he is to tell me, everything he knows.”

Hildreth took up his hat with an ugly smile. “That is your last word?” Colson nodded.

“My very last.” The two men walked to the door, and turned.

“It is not mine,” said Hildreth, and there was no mistaking the ominous note in his tone.

They stood at the window watching the two men until they had gone out of sight, and then Tim turned to his host.

“What does he want really?” he asked.

Mr. Colson roused himself from his reverie with a start.

“What does he want? I will show you. The cause of all our burglaries, the cause of this visit. Come with me.”

They turned into the passage, and as the professor stopped before the door labelled “Planetoid 127,”

Tim’s heart began to beat a little faster. Colson opened the door with two keys and ushered him into the strangest room which Tim had ever seen.

A confused picture of instruments, of wires that spun across the room like the web of a spider, of strange little machines which seemed to be endowed with perpetual motion—for they worked all the time —these were his first impressions.

The room was lined with grey felt, except on one side, where there was a strip of fibrous panelling. Towards this the professor went. Pushing aside a panel, he disclosed the circular door of a safe and, reaching in his hand, took out a small red-covered book.

“This is what the burglars want!” he said exultantly. “The Code! The Code of the Stars!”

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THE LOST CONTINENT by C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne

19. Destruction of Atlantis

A tottering old Priest came up and touched me on the shoulder.

“Well?” I said sharply, having small taste for interruption just now.

“News has been carried to the Three, my King, of what is threatened.”

“Then they will know that I stand here now, brother, to enjoy the finest fight of my life. When it is finished I shall go to the Gods, and be there standing behind the stars to welcome them when presently they also arrive. They have my regrets that they are too old and too feeble to die and look upon a fine killing themselves.”

“I have commands from them, my King, to lay upon you, which I fear you will like but slenderly. You are forbidden to find your death here in the fighting. They have a further use for you yet.”

I turned on the old man angrily enough. “I shall take no such order, my brother. I am not going to believe it was ever given. You must have misunderstood. If I am a man, if I am a Priest, if I am a soldier, if I am a King, then it stands to my honour that no enemy should pass this gate whilst yet I live. And you may go back and throw that message at their teeth.”

The old man smiled enviously. He, too, had been a keen soldier in his day. “I told them you would not easily believe such a message, and asked them for a sign, and they bore with me, and gave me one. I was to give you this jewel, my King.”

“How came they by that? It is a bracelet from the elbow of Nais.”

“They must have stripped her of it. I did not know it came from Nais. The word I was to bring you said that the owner of the jewel was inside the Ark of the Mysteries, and waited you there. The use which the Three have for you further concerns her also.”

Even when I heard that, I will freely confess that my obedience was sorely tried, and I have the less shame in setting it down on these sheets, because I know that all true soldiers will feel a sympathy for my plight. Indeed, the promise of the battle was very tempting. But in the end my love for Nais prevailed, and I gave the salutation that was needful in token that I heard the order and obeyed it.

To the knot of Priests who were left for the defence, I turned and made my farewells. You will have what I shall miss, my brothers,” I said. “I envy you that fight. But, though I am King of Atlantis, still I am only one of the Seven, and so am the servant of the Three and must obey their order. They speak in words the will of the most High Gods, and we must do as they command. You will stand behind the stars before I come, and I ask of you that you will commend me to Those you meet there. It is not my own will that I shall not appear there by your side.”

They heard my words with smiles, and very courteously saluted me with their weapons, and there we parted. I did not see the fight, but I know it was good, from the time which passed

before Phorenice's hordes broke out on to the crest of the Mountain. They died hard, that last remnant of the lesser Priests of Atlantis.

With a sour enough feeling I went up to the head of the pass, and then through the groves, and between the temples and colleges and houses which stood on the upper slopes of the Sacred Mountain, till I reached that boundary, beyond which in milder days it was death for any but the privileged few to pass. But the time, it appeared to me, was past for conventions, and, moreover, my own temper was hot; and it is likely that I should have strode on with little scruple if I had not been interrupted. But in the temple which marked the boundary, there was old Zaemon waiting; and he, with due solemnity of words, and with the whole of some ancient ritual ordained for that purpose, sought dispensation from the High Gods for my trespass, and would not give me way till he was through with his ceremony.

Already Phorenice's tower and bridge were in position, for the clash and yelling of a fight told that the small handful of Priests on the rampart of the last gate were bartering their lives for the highest return in dead that they could earn. They were trained fighting men all, but old and feeble, and the odds against them were too enormous to be stemmed for over long. In a very short time the place would be put to the storm, and the roof of the Sacred Mountain would be at the open mercy of the invader. If there was any further thing to be done, it was well that it should be set about quickly whilst peace remained. It seemed to me that the moment for prompt action, and the time for lengthy pompous ceremonial was done for good.

But Zaemon was minded otherwise. He led me up to the Ark of the Mysteries, and chided my impatience, and waited till I had given it my reverential kiss, and then he called aloud, and another old man came out of the opening which is in the top of the Ark, and climbed painfully down by the battens which are fixed on its sides. He was a man I had never seen before, hoary, frail, and emaciated, and he and Zaemon were then the only two remaining Priests who had been raised to the highest degree known to our Clan, and who alone had knowledge of the highest secrets and powers and mysteries.

"Look!" cried Zaemon, in his shrill old voice, and swept a trembling finger over the shattered city, and the great spread of sea and country which lay in view of us below. I followed his pointing and looked, and a chill began to crawl through me. All was plainly shown. Our Lord the Sun burned high overhead in a sky of cloudless blue, and day shimmered in His heat. All below seemed from that distance peaceful and warm and still, save only that the mountains smoked more than ordinary, and some spouted fires, and that the sea boiled with some strange disorder.

But it was the significance of the sea that troubled me most. Far out on the distant coast it surged against the rocks in enormous rolls of surf; and up the great estuary, at the head of which the city of Atlantis stands, it gushed in successive waves of enormous height which never returned. Already the lower lands on either side were blotted out beneath tumultuous waters, the harbour walls were drowned out of sight, and the flood was creeping up into the lower wards of the great city itself.

"You have seen?" asked Zaemon.

"I have seen."

"You understand?"

“In part.”

“Then let me tell you all. This is the beginning, and the end will follow swiftly. The most High Gods, that sit behind the stars, have a limit to even Their sublime patience; and that has been passed. The city of Atlantis, the great continent that is beyond, and all that are in them are doomed to unutterable destruction. Of old it was foreseen that this great wiping-out would happen through the sins of men, and to this end the Ark of the Mysteries was built under the direction of the Gods. No mortal implements can so much as scratch its surface, no waves or rocks wreck it. Inside is stored on sheets of the ancient writing all that is known in the world of learning that is not shared by the common people, also there is grain in a store, and sweet water in tanks sufficient for two persons for the space of four years, together with seeds, weapons, and all such other matters as were deemed fit.

“Out of all this vast country it has been decreed by the High Gods that two shall not perish. Two shall be chosen, a man and a woman, who are fit and proper persons to carry away with them the ancient learning to dispose of it as they see best, and afterwards to rear up a race who shall in time build another kingdom and do honour to our Lord the Sun and the other Gods in another place. The woman is within the Ark already, and seated in the place appointed for her, and though she is a daughter of mine, the burden of her choosing is with you. For the man, the choice has fallen upon yourself.”

I was half numb with the shock of what was befalling. “I do not know that I care to be a survivor.”

“You are not asked for your wishes,” said the old man. “You are given an order from the High Gods, who know you to be Their faithful servant.”

Habit rode strong upon me. I made salutation in the required form, and said that I heard and would obey.

“Then it remains to raise you to the sublime degree of the Three, and if your learning is so small that you will not understand the keys to many of the Powers, and the highest of the Mysteries, when they are handed to you, that fault cannot be remedied now.”

Certainly the time remaining was short enough. The fight still raged down at the gate in the pass, though it was a wonder how the handful of Priests had held their ground so long. But the ocean rolled in upon the land in an ever-increasing flood, and the mountains smoked and belched forth more volleys of rock as the weight increased on their lower parts, and presently those that besieged the Mountain could not fail to see the fate that threatened them. Then there would be no withholding their rush. In their mad fury and panic they would sweep all obstruction resistlessly before them, and those who stood in their path might look to themselves.

But there was no hurrying Zaemon and his fellow sage. They were without temple for the ceremony, without sacrifice or incense to decorate it. They had but the sky for a roof to make their echoes, and the Gods themselves for witnesses. But they went through the work of raising me to their own degree, with all the grand and majestic form which has gathered dignity from the ages, and by no one sentence did they curtail it. A burning mountain burst with a bellowing roar as the incoming waters met its fires, but gravely they went on, in turn

reciting their sentences. Phorenice's troops broke down the last resistance, and poured in a frenzied stream amongst the groves and temples, but still they quavered never in the ritual.

It had been said that this ceremony is the grandest and the most impressive of all those connected with our holy religion; and certainly I found it so; and I speak as one intimate with all the others. Even the tremendous circumstances which hemmed them in could do nothing to make these frail old men forget the deference which was due to the highest order of the Clan.

For myself, I will freely own I was less rapt. I stood there bareheaded in the heat, a man trying to concentrate himself, and yet torn the while by a thousand foreign emotions. The awful thing that was happening all around compelled some of my attention. A continent was in the very act and article of meeting with complete destruction, and if Zaemon and the other Priest were strong enough to give their minds wholly up to a matter parochial to the priesthood, I was not so stoical. And moreover, I was filled with other anxieties and thoughts concerning Nais. Yet I managed to preserve a decent show of attention to the ceremony; making all those responses which were required of me; and trying as well as might be to preserve in my mind those sentences which were the keys to power and learning, and not mere phrasings of grandeur and devotion.

But it became clear that if the ceremony of my raising did not soon arrive at its natural end, it would be cut short presently with something of suddenness. Phorenice's conquering legions swarmed out on to the crest of the Mountain, and now carried full knowledge of the dreadful thing that was come upon the country. They were out of all control, and ran about like men distracted; but knowing full well that the Priests would have brought this terrible wreck to pass by virtue of the powers which were stored within the Ark of the Mysteries, it would be their natural impulse to pour out a final vengeance upon any of these same Priests they could come across before it was too late.

It began to come to my mind that if the ceremony did not very shortly terminate, the further part of the plan would stand very small chance of completion, and I should come by my death after all by fighting to a finish, as I had pictured to myself before. My flickering attention saw the soldiers coming always nearer in their frantic wanderings, and saw also the sea below rolling deeper and deeper in upon the land.

The fires, too, which ringed in half the mountain, spurted up to double their old height, and burned with an unceasing roar. But for all distraction these things gave to the two old Priests who were raising me, we might have been in the quietness of some ancient temple, with no so much as a fly to buzz an interruption.

But at last an end came to the ceremony. "Kneel," cried Zaemon, "and make obeisance to your mother the Earth, and swear by the High Gods that you will never make improper use of the powers over Her which this day you have been granted."

When I had done that, he bade me rise as a fully installed and duly initiated member of the Three. "You will have no opportunity to practise the workings of this degree with either of us, my brother," said he, "for presently our other brother and I go to stand before the Gods to deliver to Them an account of our trust, and of how we have carried it out. But what items you remember here and there may turn of use to you hereafter. And now we two give you our farewells, and promise to commend you highly to the Gods when soon we meet Them in

Their place behind the stars. Climb now into the Ark, and be ready to shut the door which guards it, if there is any attempt by these raging people to invade that also. Remember, my brother, it is the Gods' direct will that you and the woman Nais go from this place living and sound, and you are expressly forbidden to accept challenge or provocation to fight on any pretext whatever. But as long as may be done in safety, you may look out upon Atlantis in her death-throes. It is very fitting that one of the only two who are sent hence alive, should carry the full tale of what has befallen."

I went to the top of the Ark of Mysteries then, climbing there by the battens which are fastened to the sides, and then descended by the stair which is inside and found Nais in a little chamber waiting for me.

"I was bidden stay here by Zaemon," she said, "who forced me to this place by threats and also by promises that my lord would follow. He is very ungentle, that father of mine, but I think he has a kindness for us both, and any way he is my father and I cannot help loving him. Is there no chance to save him from what is going to happen?"

"He will not come into this Ark, for I asked him. It has been ordained from the ancient time when first the Ark was built, that when the day for its purpose came, one woman and one man should be its only tenants, and they are here already. Zaemon's will in the matter is not to be twisted by you or by me. He has a message to be delivered to the Gods, and (if I know him at all), he grudges every minute that is lost in carrying it to them."

I left her then, and went out again up the stair, and stood once more on the roof of the Ark. On the Mountain top men still ran about distracted, but gradually they were coming to where the Ark rested on the highest point. For the moment, however, I passed them lightly. The drowning of the great continent that had been spread out below filled the eye. Ocean roared in upon it with still more furious waves. The plains and the level lands were foaming lakes. The great city of Atlantis had vanished eternally. The mountains alone kept their heads above the flood, and spewed out rocks, and steam, and boiling stone, or burst when the waters reached them and created great whirlpools of surging sea, and twisted trees, and bubbling mud.

In the space of a few breaths every living creature that dwelt in the lower grounds had been smothered by the waters, save for a few who huddled in a pair of galleys that were driven oarless inland, over what had once been black forest and hunting land for the beasts. And even as I watched, these also were swallowed up by the horrid turmoil of sea, and nothing but the sea beasts, and those of the greater lizards which can live in such outrageous waters, could have survived even that state of the destruction. Indeed, none but those men who had now found standing-ground on the upper slopes of the Sacred Mountain survived, and it was plain that their span was short, for the great mass of the continent sank deeper and more deep every minute before our aching eyes, beneath the boiling inrush of the seas.

But though the great mass of the soldiery were dazed and maddened at the prospect of the overwhelming which threatened them, there were some with a strength of mind too valiant to give any outward show of discomposure. Presently a compact little body of people came from out the houses and the temples, and headed directly across the open ground towards the Ark. On the outside marched Phorenice's personal guards with their weapons new blooded. They had been forced to fight a way through their own fellow soldiers. The poor demented

creatures had thought it was every one for himself now, till these guards (by their mistress's order) proved to them that Phorenice still came first.

And in the middle of them, borne in a litter of gold and ivory by her grotesque European slaves, rode the Empress, still calm, still lovely, and seemingly divided in her sentiments between contempt and amusement. Her two children lay in the litter at her feet. On her right hand marched Tatho gorgeously appavelled, and with a beard curled and plaited into a thousand ringlets. On the other side, plying her industry with unruffled defence, walked Ylga, once again fan-girl, and so still second lady in this dwindling kingdom.

The party of them halted half a score of paces from the Ark by Phorenice's order. "Do not go nearer to those unclean old men. They carry a rank odour with them, and for the moment we are short of essences to sweeten the air of their neighbourhood." She lifted her eyebrows and looked up at me. "Truly a quiet little gathering of old acquaintances. Why, there is Deucalion, that once I took the flavour of and threw aside when he cloyed me."

"I have Nais here," I said, "and presently we two will be all that are left alive of this nation."

"Nais is quite welcome to my leavings," she laughed. "I will look down upon your country cooings when presently I go back to the Place behind the stars from which I came. You are a very rustic person, Deucalion. They tell me too that three or four of these smelling old men up here have named you King. Did you swell much with dignity? Or did you remember that there was a pretty Empress left that would still be Empress so long as there was an Atlantis to govern? Come, sir, find your tongue. By my face! you must have hungered for me very madly these years we have been parted, if new-grown ruggedness of feature is an evidence."

"Have your gibe. I do not gibe back at a woman who presently will die."

"Bah! Deucalion, you will live behind the times. Have they not told you that I know the Great Secret and am indeed a Goddess now? My arts can make life run on eternally."

"Then the waters will presently test them hard," I said, but there the talk was taken into other lips. Zaemon went forward to the front of the litter with the Symbol of our Lord the Sun glowing in his hand, and burst into a flow of cursing. It was hard for me to hear his words. The roar of the waters which poured up over the land, and beat in vast waves against the Sacred Mountain itself, grew nearer and more loud. But the old man had his say.

Phorenice gave orders to her guards for his killing; yes, tried even to rise from the litter and do the work herself; but Zaemon held the Symbol to his front, and its power in that supreme moment mastered all the arts that could be brought against it. The majesty of the most High Gods was vindicated, and that splendid Empress knew it and lay back sullenly amongst the cushions of her litter, a beaten woman.

Only one person in that rigid knot of people found power to leave the rest, and that was Ylga. She came out to the side of the Ark, and leaned up, and cried me a farewell through the gathering roar of the flood.

"I would I might save you and take you with us," I said.

“As for that,” she said, with a gesture, “I would not come if you asked me. I am not a woman that will take anything less than all. But I shall meet what comes presently with the memory that you will have me always somewhere in your recollection. I know somewhat of men, even men of your stamp, Deucalion, and you will never forget that you came very near to loving me once.”

I think, too, she said something further, concerning Nais, but the bellowing rush of the waters drowned all other words. A great mist made from the stream sent up by the swamped burning mountains stopped all accurate view, though the blaze from the fires lit it like gold. But I had a last sight of a horde of soldiery rushing up the slopes of the Mountain, with a scum of surge billowing at their heels, and licking many of them back in its clutch. And then my eye fell on old Zaemon waving to me with the Symbol to shut down the door in the roof of the Ark.

I obeyed his last command, and went down the stair, and closed all ingress behind me. There were bolts placed ready, and I shot these into their sockets, and there were Nais and I alone, and cut off from all the rest of our world that remained.

I went to the place where she lay, and put my arms tightly around her. Without, we heard men beating desperately on the Ark with their weapons, and some even climbed by the battens to the top and wrenched to try and move the door from its fastenings. The end was coming very nearly to them now, and the great crowd of them were mad with terror.

I would have given much to have known how Phorenice fared in that final tumult, and how she faced it. I could see her, with her lovely face, and her wondrous eyes, and her ruddy hair curling about her neck, and by all the Gods! I thought more of her at that last moment than of the poor land she had conquered, and misgoverned, and brought to this horrid destruction. There is no denying the fascination which Phorenice carried with her.

But the end did not dally long with its coming. There was a little surge that lifted the Ark a hand's breadth or so in its cradle, and set it back again with a jar and a quiver. The blows from axes and weapons ceased on its lower part, but redoubled into frenzied batterings on its rounded roof. There were some screams and cries also which came to us but dully through the thickness of its ponderous sheathing, though likely enough they were sent forth at the full pitch of human lungs outside. And when another surge came, roaring and thundering, which picked up the great vessel as though it had been a feather, and spun it giddily; and after that we touched earth or rock no more.

We tossed about on the crest and troughs of delirious seas, a sport for the greedy Gods of the ocean. The lamp had fallen, and we crouched there in darkness, dully weighed with the burden of knowledge that we alone were saved out of what was yesterday a mighty nation.

CONCLUDES NEXT WEEK

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