

CHACAL

The Magazine Of F&SF

No. 2

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CADIGAN ■ FABIAN ■ FRAZETTA ■ REH ■ STERANKO ■ UTLEY ■ WAGNER ■ WELLMAN





STERANKO

Front cover by Jeff Easley: a scene from "Raven's Eyrie"
 Back cover by Alicia Austin: a scene from "Jirel Meets Magic"
 Inside front cover by Jim Steranko: "Mother Was A Lovely Beast"

Nickelodeon Graphics: Typesetting

Special thanks this issue go to Jeff Easley, Ben Indick, David C. Smith and Karl Edward Wagner.

This issue is humbly dedicated to:

Bright-Eyes—"In this life I've seen everything I can see, Woman,
 But I've never seen nothin' like you."

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FICTION



Page 4

The Adventure of the Grinder's Whistle

by Sir Simon Malone, edited by Howard Waldrop

The streets of London were the source of all manner of adventure and excitement for young boys. Yet, little did Simon realize that on a single foggy evening he would come face to face with the world's most celebrated detective as well as England's foulest villain.

Page 4

Raven's Eyrie

by Karl Edward Wagner

Only Inor was glad to see the rising of the Demonlord's moon—she knew that it would bring her long-awaited vengeance down on Kane and rid her of the living reminder of a time of shame and torment.

Page 8

Last Chance for Angina Pectoris at Miss Sadie's Saloon, Dry Gulch

by Pat Cadigan

All that life held for them now were the possibilities of plastic organs and loneliness; perhaps that's why they sought happiness at Miss Sadie's. After all, Miss Sadie was a lady. For sure.

Page 30

The Next to the Last Voyage of the Cuttle Sark

by M. M. Moamrath, edited by Bill Wallace & Joe Pumillia

In hushed whispers, over strong drinks and under sturdy tables, sailors still speak of the day when a denizen of the briney boys' room rose from the depths to claim a bride. And who would have guessed that the "Ballad of Davey Kraken" would serve as the wedding march?

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The End of Days (conclusion)

by David C. Smith

The driving force behind Theodir's unmatched strength was, ironically, his weakness for supreme power and its supreme corruption. He was bound only for the last: great destruction and he was dragging his whole world toward it.

Page 48

To 1966

by Steven Utley

He was far more than psychopathic; he was chronopathic as well, and his twisted feelings of loss and resentment led him to what was perhaps the ultimate perversity—the rape of time itself.

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SPECIAL FEATURES

Daughter of Evil

Poetry by Robert E. Howard

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Palace of Bast

Poetry by Robert E. Howard

Page 35

Celtia: A Portfolio by Jim Fitzpatrick

Classical and pulp authors alike have drawn many of their most popular ideas from the rich history and mythology of Ireland. Artist and Irishman Fitzpatrick gives us a well-researched tour of his country's vivid heritage.

Page 26

Interview: Manly Wade Wellman

Over white lightning and Pabst Blue Ribbon chasers, Mr. Wellman shares with his readers his thoughts on the fantasy field, the people who populate it, and his contribution to the genre.

Page 38

Philippe Druillet: A Fevered Glimpse of Chaos

by Dave McFerran

Author McFerran discusses and analyzes the artistic skill of France's master of fantasy and the macabre. "To be confronted by a Druillet painting for the first time can be a shattering experience indeed and one that you're not likely to forget for a long, long time."

Page 60

DEPARTMENTS

Editorials

A familiar face returns, accompanied by a new, far more attractive one. No wonder Arnie's smiling!

Page 2

Cast & Credits

A bit of biographical information on the people who made this issue possible. You might mail various pastries with accompanying files to the truly desperate-looking characters in care of the editors. . .

Page 3

Letters

Threats, praise and incisive comments from our readers—with perhaps a line or two from the editor to ruin the whole effect!

Page 46

Crosswinds

The latest news from across the pond, for those who are interested in the European fantasy market.

Page 69

U. S. News

Unabashed freebie mentions of items meant to prick your interests and empty your pay envelopes.

Page 71

Kirk's Corner

REH constantly told us how Conan would gird his loins, journey to an exotic clime and "sell his sword." Well, Tim has done a bit of research and now shows us what Howard *really* meant.

Page 25

Page 48





Undoubtedly, those who were with us for our first issue will notice some changes in CHACAL's editorial approach and design scheme this time around. Ideas and ideals have ways of changing and none can foretell when they might do so—and yet, alterations are to be expected. Our various publishing ventures have all been a learning experience for us in some form or another and I would like to think that during the past few years *my* maturity as a publisher has slowly developed, despite occasional lapses in judgment and consideration. I would also hope that the responsibility I have to you, the magazine's supporters and readers, has become more fully realized since the first issue of *Lone Star Fictioneer* appeared on the market. Perhaps the largest obstacle in our path has been our inexperience in producing a product of this type and our failure to communicate with all of the people who make LSF/CHACAL/*whatever*, possible. The problems incurred with production were inevitable—no one can be expected to burst upon the scene cold and master all of the intricacies of lay-out, paste-up and printing, not to mention editing and designing, in a matter of months—but our lack of correspondence with our customers was an unforeseen occurrence entirely.

Well, I'd like to think that those days are behind us and won't return again. Help us to make this magazine the publication that you truly want it to be—respond to our efforts with criticism, personal ideas, or a hearty slap on the back when we do something you like. But by all means, above all else, make CHACAL your place to come with your thoughts—after all, we'd like to share *ours* with *you*.

As to the changes in our editorial staff, they're mostly personal and probably wouldn't make good reading to anyone except those who enjoy reading various gossip columns. Let us simply say that the former editor was given, perhaps unfairly, more responsibility and control than he was capable of effectively handling and for those reasons he was replaced. Byron always was quite individualistic and I'm afraid that his psychological make-up couldn't permit him to share credit with anyone on a project and be satis-

fied. Needless to say, I sincerely hope that he will be happier in his other pursuits and I wish him luck.

On the brighter side, it's a distinct pleasure to introduce you to our new associate editor, Pat Cadigan. Through her suggestions, ideas and support, the magazine has straightened out its keel and now looks to be heading on an even, fresher course. She's helped to make things a bit brighter in the gloom and I think that her outlooks will help us all see things in a little different, more optimistic light.

Also joining the editorial department is everyone's favorite Irishman, Dave McFerran. As well as gathering news tid-bits for his "Crosswinds" column, Dave is an active fan publisher and officer in the BFS (more information to be had on our news page). Where he finds time i anyone's guess, but he'll be soliciting contributions for us from across the pond as well as conducting interviews with British fantasy personalities.

We're *still* growing and new faces will be popping up from time to time—and we'll constantly be experimenting with our content. We're going to attempt to make each issue a fresh happening and we'll try not to fit into a single, stagnating mold. The field is broad and there's always something new to discover; let's go adventuring *together*.

Next issue, I'd like to talk to you about an award for the fantasy field that Jon Bacon (of *Fantasy Crossroads*) and I are trying to make a reality. Think about those contributors to the field whom you feel deserve recognition; think about categories and a place of presentation—and let us know about it. I'll also be talking about various projects that are lurking around the corner, waiting to have the spark of life breathed into them. (Permission is granted to pant expectantly until that time.)

But meanwhile, please don't lose your sense of wonder: the dreamers have always been the group most scoffed at, yet it's been they who have inevitably accomplished the most. Don't be afraid to have an imagination—be *thankful* for it.

Take care.

Arnie Fenner

It all started last summer when Arnie bought a story from me. Then came the plying with drinks and fresh oysters on the half shell with requests for the spellings of difficult words. The next thing I knew, I was riding shotgun on a runaway magazine. *Me*, displaced New Englander, escapee from graduate school and general old reprobate, an associate editor? Well, hell, I thought, this could be fun and look at all the mail you can get. (Now, will someone out there please write us some letters?)

One of the first things I noticed—after I got past the stack of manuscripts to be read, the mountain of letters to be written (Arn, why didn't you *tell* me, you hustler?), the blurbs to be composed, the deadlines to be worried over—was that there was a definite lack of women on the contributor's page. (OK, Arn, surrender those women. Where are you hiding them?)

Females are few in this field, which may account (in part) for the enormous amount of literature about them and the many fascinating characters created—Belit, San Diego Lightfoot Sue, Cija, Jirel, Shambleau—these last two created by the woman you met in CHACAL no. 1, C. L. Moore, one of the real greats—to fill the gap. Well, this issue, we're *bringing on the women!*

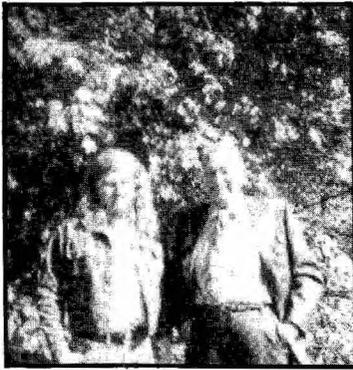
All three of them.

Well, they didn't put up Rome in a day, either. It is my hope that in future issues of CHACAL we will be seeing more and more women: the creators and dreamers, the writers and artists. Women who are more than larger-than-life characters, more than proud beauties, as it were.

Before you start wondering, this isn't going to be a feminist soap-box. This isn't the place for it. CHACAL is, first and foremost, a magazine of entertainment and enjoyment, with room for everyone to have a good time—and I feel certain we will. Putting this issue together has been something like being at a constantly-ongoing party with our contributors and other correspondents, though I've never met most of them in person. So far, it's been a good bash—I think we're in fine company. Stick around—the next phase should be even better.

Pat Cadigan

Cast & Credits



Wagner & Wellman

Severin



McFerran



Waldrop



Alicia Austin is one of the few women fantasy illustrators actively working today, and probably the most versatile as well. A resident of California, Alicia has long been a fan of Ms. Moore's Jirel of Joiry series and is presently slated to illustrate a special hardback collection of those stories. Her back cover this issue should prove to one and all that she's more than capable of doing the character justice.

"I don't do windows and I don't punch cows!" Pat Cadigan has been heard to proclaim when under pressure. Not that she *couldn't* do either, if she had a mind to—Pat has so much talent wrapped up in her 5'4" frame that she could undertake any task and be a success. "Last Chance for Angina Pectoris" is her first published fiction and you can rest assured that it'll hardly be her last.

Clyde Caldwell, illustrator of the above-mentioned Ms. Cadigan's story, describes himself as a "defrocked Buddhist monk, who, while climbing down a mountain to civilization, fell into a crevasse, tearing off both arms and legs in the process. Yet, being the ingenious fellow that I am, I developed a technique of drawing by holding my pen in my belly button. Honest." Uh-huh.

Since his premiere in and on the cover of CHACAL no. 1, Jeff Easley has acquired a steadily-growing fan following and we're sure that his cover and illustrations for "Raven's Eyrie" will garner him even more admirers. For those who may be wondering what this talented young Kentuckian can do for an encore, rest assured that Jeff will rise *easley* (hmmm) to the occasion and will follow his own act with another truly superb one.

Steve Fabian's distinctive artistic style adds ethereal beauty to the otherwise grim forecasts of "The End of Days." The recipient of numerous Hugo and World Fantasy Awards nominations, Steve has definitely carved a cozy niche for himself in the hearts of fantasy fans everywhere.

Jim Fitzpatrick has the power and skill necessary to draw viewers to his work, as we're sure his Celtic folio this issue proves. Soon to become a N. Y. resident, we can only feel confident that he'll excite American fans in the same spectacular way that he's enthralled the Europeans.

The two poems by Robert E. Howard this issue are a bit different in mood and structure, even for the prolific creator of Conan and Solomon Kane. Strangely, they've remained unpublished since they were first written shortly before REH's suicide in

1936—and perhaps will serve to whet your appetites for the novella by this illustrious Texan slated to appear next issue.

No, we didn't uncover a new illustration by Virgil Finlay to accompany the Wellman interview this issue—it's the product of the multi-talented Steve Jones. Besides serving as editor of the BFS fanzine, *Dark Horizons*, Steve accepts commissions as a hobby and is presently planning on bringing out a magazine titled *Fantasy Tales* later in the year.

Who can keep from smiling at the situations created by Tim Kirk? Put your hand down, Scrooge! Tim once again showcases his talent in the spot we've designated as "Kirk's Corner"—and be on the lookout for a cover painting in the future from K. C.'s resident Hugo tycoon and erstwhile Hallmark Cards artist.

Vikki Marshall is known to her circle of intimates as Lady Excitement—she *happens*. Currently an illustrator for Hallmark Cards, here she makes a departure from the usual to display her madcap sense of humor and produce a fitting complement to another long-lost Moamrath yarn.

Dave "Cuddles" McFerran is game for anything and (we've heard through the key-hole) that no matter how outrageous the story involving him sounds, it's probably true. Yet, how else does one have a good time in Belfast anyway? This time, Dave has tackled the subject of Phillippe Druillet's mind-bending art with the same alacrity he tackles—well, never mind.

Mortimer Morbius Moamrath was an enigma to his neighbors and few mourned him when a giant hand came down from a cloud and plucked him into oblivion. In fact, many today find it regretful that the unknown being didn't carry off M. M. M.'s manuscripts as well. Oddly enough, Bill Wallace and Joe Pumilia feel a kinship with the old fellow and have uncovered yet another example of Mortimer's writing talent (?).

Jim Pitts has been described by some critics as "the new Hannes Bok." Whether it's true or not, Jim is definitely a talent in his own right and has proved to be one of England's fastest rising artists. His surrealistic interpretation of "To 1966" is different in scope and structure than anything we've published yet.

"With all these kids, I gotta keep drawin'," John Severin says with a broad Irish grin. Perhaps, though we'd wager that when the children are grown and gone, John will still be producing work for comics

and magazines, because he's an *artist* in the sense of the word. As a special treat for his vocal army of fans, we proudly present J. P.'s interpretation of Moorcock's immortal champion, Erekoose.

Reactions were generally favorable, if not downright appreciative, to David C. Smith's opening segment of "The End of Days" last issue. Yet, for those who felt the second half couldn't be as exciting as the first, there'll be more than one surprise as the story builds to its fever-pitched conclusion.

Rarely can Randy Spurgin be found with excess time on his hands. When he's not managing a B. Dalton's in Indianapolis he's racing neck and neck with deadlines for various artistic commissions. Not only did he collaborate with Arnie on the illo for "The Adventure of the Grinder's Whistle," but he produced a delightfully whimsical logo for our "Letters" page. Needless to say, there's more to come.

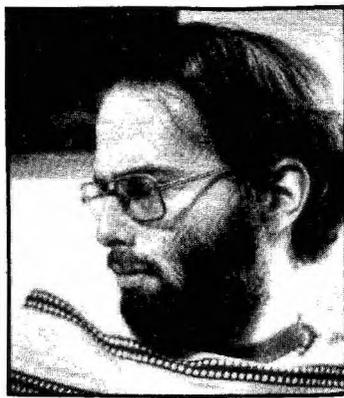
In a sense, Jim Steranko is the Harlan Ellison of the art field: an innovator, a maverick, an individual, and a true talent. While a popular personality and speaker at conventions, much of Jim's time these days is spent working on his magazine, *MediaScene*, and painting covers for various paperback firms. His illustration this issue is a bit different from the type he's best known for—but didn't we say he was an innovator?

Steven Utley, at 28, has appeared in a number of publications: *F&SF*, *Mystery Monthly*, *Galaxy*, and anthologies such as *New Dimensions*, *Universa*, and *Stellar SF Stories*, besides co-editing *Lone Star Universe* with Geo. W. Proctor. A self-professed homebody, he takes his work seriously and, as the recent Nebula ballot shows, others do, too.

Karl Edward Wagner thought that once he quit his psychiatric practice, he'd have more time for his second love: writing (his lovely wife Barbara being his first). Fat chance. Deluged with offers from eager publishers, Karl is usually behind schedule—but his fiction is well worth the wait. "Raven's Eyrie" is one of his longer Kane tales and is sure to please all, whether you're into HF or not. Karl also took time out from his various projects and interviewed Manly Wade Wellman for us—and for that, we toast our next can of Coors to him.

Howard Waldrop talked his ageing friend, Sir Simon Malone, into putting his experiences down on paper. Others have purported to produce true stories of run-ins with the world's greatest detective, but we're more than willing to boast that this is one of the most intriguing accounts.

Easley



Cadigan

Marshall



Pitts





LONDON DAILY GLOBE

LONDON DAILY GLOBE

RIPPER STRIKES!!

MURDERER FLEED - THIRTEEN AWED

A.S.
R.S.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE



GRINDER'S WHISTLE

by SIR SIMON MALONE

Edited by HOWARD WALDROP

Illustrated by Arnie Fenner (pencils)
& Randy Spurgin (inks)

Author's Foreword: Retelling events which happened when one was seven years of age, from a vantage point eighty-six years removed, is a dangerous undertaking. Events blur and change in the mind, and one summer or fall, one neighborhood and another, this vista and that bit of scenery become confused.

I confess this is normally so. There is one singular event in my life which has never, and will never, lose its sharp edges. Of that, I am sure. Those which came later; the adventure with Professor Challenger in Maple White Land, the aftermath of the comet, and with the earth needle were surely excitement enough for any man's life. That I was privileged, during the last war, to write the history of His Majesty's part in the development of the fission bomb was an additional boon which time gave me.

My part in the affair of which I write is small, and will not detain the reader for very long. My agent has insisted that I commit this memory to print. I am, I believe, giving an account which has not been told before.

A few words of explanation. I came to London with my mother soon after the death of my father in the late summer of 1888. We were living with my aunt's family, and I was very happy at the time since I was held out of school for that fall term. How I fell in with the rough gang to be described is not important. It involved several fistfights, most of which I won, and an initiation which, if my widowed mother had ever known about, would have assured that I had been returned to the halls of academe forthwith.

Let us go back, then, to the era of fog and gaslights. . .

It was a foggy night, and we were following around behind the lamp-lighter and turning off the gas.

Jenkins, our leader, was a gangly lad of fifteen. He towered far over me, as did the others, all except for Neddie, who was a big lug, if ever there was one.

We'd sneak behind the lampman, old Mr.

Soakes. Very quiet-like, Jenkins would lift one of the younger of us (sometimes myself or Aubrey) up and we'd twist off the supply and all be gone giggling and laughing down the alleyways.

(I sometimes came home those days with traces of soot behind my ears I'd failed to clean off, and would suffer my mother's reproofs.)

We were having to be very careful for constables. What with the Ripper murders, and all, they'd doubled the force in our district.

My mother and I had had a discussion about that, too. One which I'd won by shocking her Calvinistic upbringing. She said I wasn't to go out at night because the Ripper was about. I told her that no one who wasn't a lady of easy virtue had anything to worry about from the fiend.

Us fellows had had talks about the Ripper. He was the topic of conversation in London, even in our circles, which were none too high. Some of us thought he was a fine-dressed gentleman who came down to White-chapel to work his way with the ladies. Some thought him a butcher gone mad, or to be like old Sweeny Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street some years ago. Jack Leather-apron, people were calling him, and we could envision him all covered in blood from head to foot, carrying off the heart of his victim. Others supposed he was one of the mad Russian socialists who lived all together in the big house over in Seldon Row West, out killing capitalists. He was sure starting at the bottom of the money ladder if he were, we agreed.

"Well," said Jenkins that night, after we'd put out the twelfth light and had to cut through fences because old Soakes had seen

us and given the alarm. We'd heard some bobby-whistles and club-thumping a few minutes later, but by then we were holed up in the basement where we held our meetings.

"Well what, then?" asked Neddie, all out of breath. "The coppers have put the kibosh on the fun tonight. They'll be looking for us, sure."

"Let's go filch from the pruneseller in the Square," said Aubrey, who was older than me, but even shorter.

"Aw, who wants prunes?" asked Neddie.

Toldo Wigmore, who read a lot but didn't say much, grunted.

"What is it, Toldo?" asked Jenkins, all attention.

"I's just thinkin' 'pon what we kin do to-morrer," said Toldo. He hitched up the leg of his knicker and scratched. "We could all go out to Maxon Heath and see the new steam combine-tractor. It's just in from Americker."

"Capital idea!" I said, and they all looked at me, expectant. "But you can't. I re—" and you must remember that I wanted to be one of the gang, so I couldn't let on that I read, yet. My mother'd taught me to read before I was five, she being somewhat of a progressive. So I caught my slip in time. "I mean, my mom told me it was stolen early this morning."

"Was not!" yelled Toldo. "Leastwise, I ain't seen that in no newspapers. Yer mother's lying!"

Before the fight could start, there was somewhat of a fight upstairs, and Jenkins went to see what it was. He came bounding downstairs with a whoop in a few seconds. "Line up, men!" he hollers, all official like a sergeant major.

We were hopped to and stood before him in the basement.

"We've been hired by a gentleman," he said. We gave a ragged cheer. I joined in, though I'd only heard about working from one of the boys who'd been in the gang longer.

"All right, you newer members," said Jen-

kins, pacing back and forth before us, looking especially hard at Aubrey and myself. "You're to remember that we do anything within reason for the gentleman, and when we're paid off, half the money is to go to the club funds."

I didn't like that very well. I knew that meant Jenkins would end up with most of my money before this was over. And they'd told me about looking for tarbarrels all one night once, down at the quays and such. I didn't look to have a very pleasant night ahead of me.

"All right," says Jenkins, "let's go!"

We ran, whooping and hollering and raising a commotion through the streets and alleys, and got two more boys on the way. Our yelling caught in our throats, though, when we saw the bobbies and their lanterns ahead of us in the fog.

We got very respectable. A sergeant of police stopped us. He was wearing his slicker and his hardpot hat with the shield on it. It was the first bobby I'd really seen up close. He had a great thick mustache. I was very impressed.

"Here, boys," he said, spreading his arms like a railcrossing signal. "You can't come through here. There's been a foul deed perpetrated."

"I'll bet it's the Ripper!" said Toldo, out of the corner of his mouth.

Jenkins became very respectful-looking, and took off his cap. "We've been sent for by that gentleman over there, sergeant," he said, pointing into the fog.

"He sent for you, did he?" asked the policeman. "Just a mo'." He walked over to a plainclothes-dressed man and spoke to him. The fellow looked us over from under his bowler hat and said something to the sergeant. There were others moving around in the fog like ghosts. I couldn't see what had happened, but there was a great knot of police standing toward one of the building corners.

"All right, you boys," said the sergeant, returning. "Stand about out of the way. And don't you touch nothing."

"Fine, sir," said Jenkins. "We shan't."

"We moved to the building wall opposite the gathering of policemen. Jenkins kept us all quiet and in line.

There was a bluff-looking man with a mustache standing with the bobbies. He didn't look like any policeman to me. He held one of his shoulders just a little higher than the other, and was talking with two of the plainclothes detectives.

"Would you look at thart," said Toldo, to me, and pointed.

There was a man crawling around on the paving of the street.

"Is he hurt?" I asked Jenkins. "Maybe he's the one that's hurt?"

"Naw. That's the man who hired us," said the leader. "That's. . ."

"Step over here a moment, Watson, and have a look at this," said the man on the ground, peering toward the knot of policemen.

"Of course, Holmes," said the man with the off-shoulder. We were quite near them, so I heard all this.

The man on all fours moved around until

he got the gaslight shining before him.

"This Ripper business is ghastly, what?" said the bluff man.

"What do you make of these?" asked Holmes, getting to one knee above the cobles.

Watson peered at the uneven pavings. I couldn't see what they were looking at.

"Faint scratches of some sort," he said.

"Quite right, Watson, quite right." Holmes dropped to the ground again and looked left and right.

"Whatever are you doing, Holmes?" asked the other.

"Be a good fellow and see if Lestrade needs any help. I should imagine your bedside manner could calm the woman," said Mr. Holmes.

For the first time I noticed there was a woman among the police. She seemed to be talking, and I heard some whimpers from the crowd. It may have been her, but the fog muffled voices so I couldn't tell.

Two of the plainclothesmen came toward Watson as he got up. As they left the group of constables, I saw a lumpy greatcoat lying on the street. Someone had thrown it over a body, for a great pool of blood was drying around it. I nudged Aubrey and he poked Toldo and Toldo jabbed Jenkins, but Jenkins just nodded his head wisely.

That's why he's the leader.

"Dr. Daniels agrees with you, Dr. Watson. However, it remains to be seen what will come out at the inquest. I'm not entirely convinced at all. Not at all," said the plainclothesman in the bowler hat.

"What do you propose is happening, Lestrade?" asked Holmes, getting up from the street and wiping his hands.

"Certainly no mad Jack the Ripper is committing these deeds. I refuse to believe a man to be capable of such violence."

"You may be right, there, Lestrade," said Holmes, but I don't think the policeman was paying any attention. He seemed to be waiting to be asked something.

"Well," asked Dr. Watson. "What's your explanation, Inspector?"

"Suicide," said Lestrade, with a note of triumph.

"Suicide?" asked Watson.

Toldo started to giggle, but Jenkins silenced him with a foot in the ankle.

"Certainly," said the plainclothesman. "These unfortunate women of the streets, in remorse for having sunk to such a low level, drink themselves senseless, stumble to some doorway here in Whitechapel, and do themselves in with repeated jabs of large knives. It's all very simple."

"So is the Inspector," whispered Toldo.

"But, Lestrade, what becomes of the murder weapon?" asked Watson.

"With their last ounce of strength, they fling the knives away from themselves. I'm sure my men's search of the rooftops and curbs will reveal the instrument of suicide." The inspector put his hands in his vest pockets and rocked back and forth on his heels.

"Very interesting, Inspector," said Holmes. "Might I now interview the woman you have there? I have certain questions of my own."

"Certainly, Mr. Holmes. Though she claims to have heard this non-existent Leather

Apron. She's frightened, like the rest of the inhabitants of the district, by the newspaper headlines and the penny-dreadfuls. She'll not be of any use to you if it's the truth you're after."

And, to this day, I'll swear I heard Mr. Holmes say this to Inspector Lestrade. He said: "Often, in the search for truth, the frightened have more to offer than the brave."

A P. C. had finished taking down notes from the woman, and brought her towards us. She looked shabby-respectable, like someone's great-auntie fallen on bad times.

"She manages the doss house across the way," said Lestrade to Mr. Holmes, under his breath.

The woman was holding her hands and moaning.

"Oh, it was 'orrible, 'orrible!" she said.

"Madame," said Holmes, "though I realize you are in distress, there are certain things I must ask you."

"Oh, it was 'orrible!" she said, as if Holmes were not there. Someone brought her some brandy from a house down the way. She drank at it and seemed to calm down. Holmes stood patiently, watching until she had finished. He was a tall man, with a nose like a beak. He reminded me of a heron, except that he had bright eyes, like a cat's. They caught glints from the gaslamps and police lanterns as I watched. My knicker leg was working free of the sock and I bent to rebutton it. I didn't hear the woman when she first started talking again.

"... way she was screaming. Like the devil himself was after her. And he was, too. Him with his satanic whistle. He. . ."

"Whistle? Whistle, did you say?" asked Mr. Holmes, all rushing. "What type of whistle? Any melody?"

"No, no tune to it, at all. That's what made it so eerie. That, an 'im sharpenin' 'is knives again and again, over and over. . ."

"A sound like, say, someone using a large whetstone? Like a scissors-grinder?" asked Holmes, all nervous-like.

"That's it! That's it exactly!" said the old woman.

"Just as I thought!" yelled Mr. Holmes. "Watson, you have your revolver?"

"Yes, Holmes, of course. What is it?"

"No time, Watson. The game's afoot."

Jenkins snapped to, with a call of "Attention!" This made the police and some of the bystanders jump.

"Ah," said Holmes. "Jenkins."

"Baker Street Irregulars reporting for duty, Mr. Holmes."

"Good," said Holmes. "Then I shan't worry about needing reinforcements from the Yard."

"Inspector," said Holmes, turning to Lestrade. "If I remember correctly, the lowest road to be reached from here, by. . . say, a coach and four. . . is Bremick Road. Do. . ."

I spoke before the inspector. "The lowest place is near the drain into the river, Mr. Holmes." I stumbled, then continued. "In the alleyways across from the pier. Though a coach-and-four would have to take several short streets between here and there."

"Good!" said Holmes. "Bright lad." He turned again to Lestrade. "Meet me, then, at

Bremick Road with five armed men as soon as you're done here. Come, Watson! Irregulars, ho!"

"But where?" asked Lestrade, as we hurried away.

"The Irregulars will lead you," yelled Mr. Holmes, as we ran into the thickening fog.

It made me proud.

We all ran so fast I was winded quick. But it was Doctor Watson who began to slow after we had run twenty blocks. "Dammit, Holmes," he yelled. "I'm afraid I can't keep this up much longer. The jezail bullet in my shoulder, you know?"

"Quite all right," said Mr. Holmes, bending low to the cobbles as he had every hundred feet or so since we left the police. "The fog is thickening. I propose the Ripper will come with it. We're quite close enough already. I've lost the trail sometime back. I must station the Irregulars and flush out our Cheeky Jack."

We rushed onto the Road. Holmes surveyed about him through the fog. "Station yourself there, Watson, with your revolver handy. You—" he pointed to me.

"Malone," said I.

"Malone, keep watch with Dr. Watson. Be his ears and eyes if he needs them."

He turned, motioned to Jenkins and the others, then faced back to Watson.

"When the Ripper comes, Watson, and he surely shall, you must aim for the glasses."

"His glasses? Whatever do you mean, Holmes? What? How will I know the Ripper when he comes?"

"You'll know him well enough, Watson. He'll be whistling and sharpening his knives."

"But Holmes!" said Watson, frustrated.

"He shall come from that alley, and you'll know him, Watson. Be a steady fellow." And then he was gone with the other members of the gang into the roiling fog.

"But, Holmes. . ." said Dr. Watson, into the mist.

I was shivering with excitement and the cold.

Dr. Watson turned to me. "What the devil did Holmes mean, I must aim for his glasses? And how does he know where the Ripper will come from? And why with the fog?"

"I—I'm sure I don't know," I said to him.

"Oh. . . oh. Pardon me, lad," he said. "I'm quite sure you don't." He had the air of someone distracted. He was a large man himself, and his greatcoat made him seem all the larger. He had a reddish mustache, blockish features and reminded me of an uncle of mine on my father's side.

"There's danger here, er. . . Malone," he said. "We must wait quietly and make no noise. You're up to danger, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir," I said, very resolutely, though my heart was in my throat.

Though there was a light cold breeze off the River, the fog grew thicker than it had been all evening. I stood in place and trembled.

We had been waiting about ten minutes, I guess, when we both thought we heard something. Was that a whistle? My skin went all gooseflesh. Coming face to face with Jack the Ripper would not be as much fun as I had once imagined. Dr. Watson cocked his

head and gripped his Webley revolver more tightly. Little beads of moisture were collecting on his hat and dripping down his coat-front. I was becoming soaked through, and my teeth began to chatter.

Then the sound came to us again. It was like the old lady said; a high, keening tuneless whistle. I looked toward the fog in the alleyway across from us, the place Mr. Holmes said the Ripper would come from. I could barely see the buildings to each side.

Dr. Watson regripped his pistol. The tuneless whistle came, now soft, now loud, as if the Ripper were moving to and fro across the alley, perhaps checking doorways for victims. I could see him in my mind: a huge formless man, all covered with gore from head to heel, eating the liver. . .

I jumped as Dr. Watson brushed my arm.

The sound was coming toward us.

It was then I heard the sound with it, as must have the doctor. A sharp clicking sound. I had heard sounds like it, but much smaller, when on vacation at Blackpool with my mother and father.

I could only liken it to the opening and closing of the claws of a giant crab.

I saw Dr. Watson take aim along his revolver barrel where the alleyway entered the thoroughfare. Then the mists thickened, and all across the street was lost to view. He lowered his pistol and stepped into the roadway from our hiding place. I went out with him. My heart wasn't in it.

The noises came louder. The eerie whistle sent shivers along my damp spine. The tenor of the clicking grew and changed; they now sounded exactly as if someone were sharpening a large knife again and again. What a sound. . .

I started to wet my pants but held back.

I could see now why those poor women the Ripper killed must have frozen in their tracks when they heard him coming, while he bore down on them and perpetrated his outrages.

The fog roiled. The whistling grew louder. A shape moved at the edge of the alleyway, and the whistling and whetting fairly screamed toward us.

Dr. Watson braced his legs, swung his barrel in line with the shape. He fired twice, the discharges lighting his face and arm pure white. He couldn't have missed, that close.

Like a juggernaut of doom, the Ripper came down at us. He was immense. I couldn't see anything distinct, but sensed something *big*, like in a nightmare, coming for me. He was whistling louder, sharpening his knife like a demon as he charged across the alley for me and the doctor.

A voice on the rooftop behind us yelled, "The glasses, Watson! *The glasses!*"

At the same time, I saw a glint of light above the ground, reflected from the gaslight down the way, as the Ripper came for me.

So did Dr. Watson. He emptied his Webley at it.

There was a loud shrill whistle and a scream, and the Ripper slowed his movement. A few seconds later, the sound of whetting died away in the fog.

"Good show, Watson," said Mr. Holmes, climbing down from the rooftop. "Well done, old man."

Through the fog, I heard police whistles, pounding of feet and nightsticks, and the yells of the Irregulars coming toward us.

I *had* wet my pants.

"You mean to tell me, Holmes," Watson said loudly as the detective examined the silent machinery with Lestrade and the constables, "that you were watching all the time! Why, we might have been killed!"

"Things were well in hand, Watson. If you failed to shoot out the pressure glasses on the combine machine, I was prepared to jump from the rooftop and engage the hand brake, there." He pointed to the operating levers of the steam behemoth.

"What a ghastly machine," remarked Lestrade. "Five murders, by this?"

"Wrong, Lestrade," said Holmes, examining the tractor. "The Ripper still stalks Whitechapel. This steam combine is responsible only for the death of the streetwalker tonight."

"Whatever put you on to it, Mr. Holmes?" asked Lestrade.

"The marks in the street, and the mutilations of the body," said the detective, lighting a pipe with a match struck against the boiler of the tractor. "That, and the comment of the witness to the whistle and continuous sharpening of the knives. Whistles suggest steam, continuous motion suggests machinery. Steam-driven machinery, simply."

"Deduction tells us," he continued after a puff, "that the farmers who thought the machine stolen had not properly extinguished the boiler fires. They only banked them. Something in the valves failed, probably due to humidity in the fogs. The steam combine trundled itself away. It followed the lowest courses into London. The valve must have closed in the evening, banking the fires once more. At nightfall, the return of the fog opened the valve once more. The unfortunate woman happened in its way. She was either too drunk or too frightened to move, and was caught up in the rakes."

"How dreadful," said Lestrade.

"Eventually," said Mr. Sherlock Holmes, "The steam machine would have run into the Thames. And this Jack Leatherapron, at least, would disappear from the face of London."

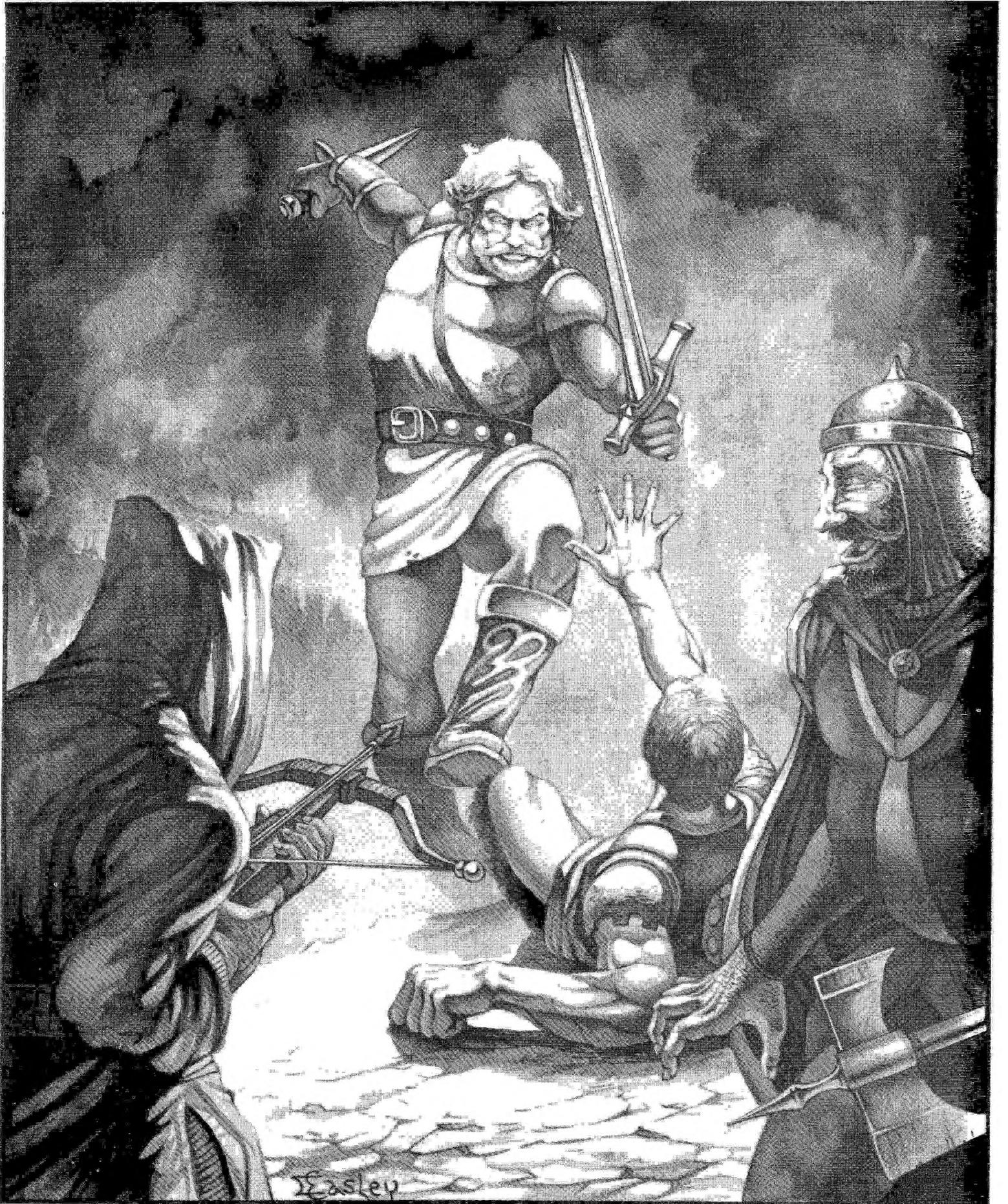
"But what of the real Ripper?" asked Lestrade.

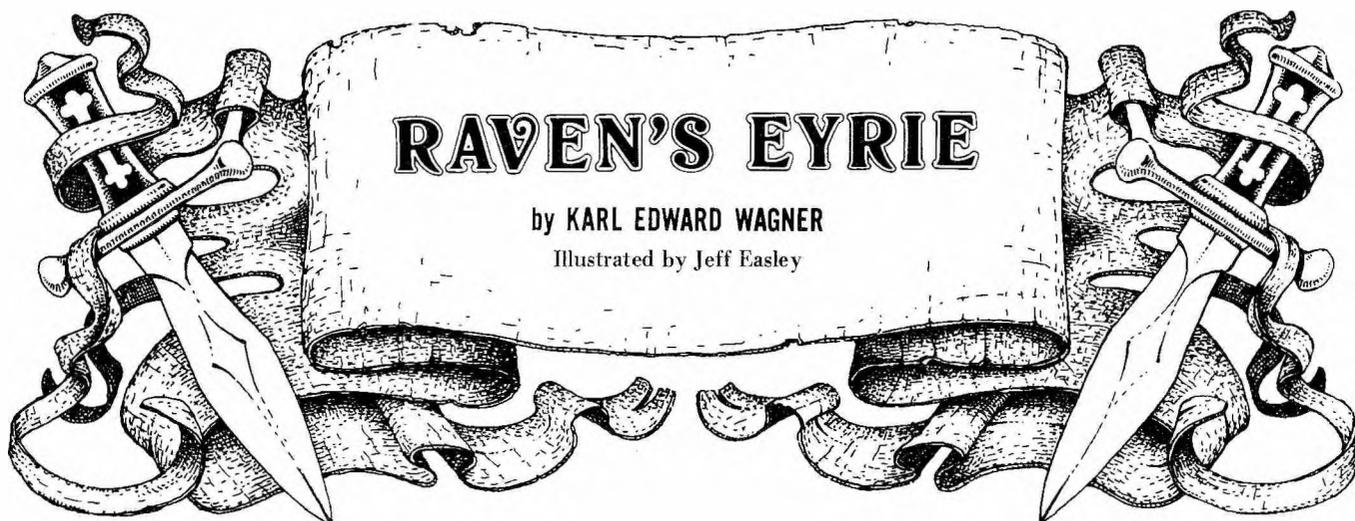
"Your superintendent has already engaged the services of Doctor Doyle, Lestrade," said Holmes. "I shan't be needed."

"Jenkins," said Holmes, turning to us. "Your Irregulars behaved admirably, especially young Malone, there." He winked at me with his bright eyes like glass. "I wouldn't mind having to depend upon him in a tight." Holmes handed Jenkins coins. "Your usual pay, plus a bonus. Now, perhaps you'd better get out of Lestrade's way."

We took off then, back to Baker Street, hollering. There Jenkins divided up the money. Then I had to tell them how it was a dozen times or more. By morning, we were laughing. Near dawn, the whole damn thing seemed miles away, and comical, and already we were calling it Jack the Reaper.

They never did notice my pants. □





The child awoke at the sound of her own scream. A thin scream, imbued with the fever that parched her throat. And still a scream tight with the terror of her dream. Its echo hung on the bare timbered walls of her narrow room, as she bolted from her damp pillow.

Her fever-bright eyes stared wide with fear, as they darted about the room's shadowy corners. But the phantoms of her nightmare, if nightmare it was, had receded. Klesst brushed the clinging tendrils of red hair from her moist forehead and sat up.

Through the greenish bull's-eye glass of her lattice window, she could see the declining sun, impaled upon the reddened fangs of the mountains. The late autumn night would close quickly, and the darkness of her nightmare would surround her. And this was the night when the Demonlord walked the earth. . .

Shivering despite her heightened temperature, Klesst dropped back against the straw mattress. "Mother!" she called plaintively, wondering why her outcry had not brought someone to her side.

"Mother!" she called again. She longed to call Greshha's name, but remembered that the stout serving woman had been sent away from the inn for the night. Greshha had not wanted to leave her. Not when she was sick, not on the night of her birthday. Not on *this* night. It was cruel of her mother to send her away, Greshha, whom she looked upon as her nurse. Smiling Greshha, Greshha of warm hands and soft bosom. Not hard and cold like Mother.

Greshha would have answered her cry. It was cruel of Mother to ignore her like this.

"What is it, Klesst?" Mother's frown regarded her warily from the doorway. She had heard no footsteps on the thick boards of the long hallway. Mother moved so silently always.

"I'm thirsty, Mother. My throat feels so hot. Please bring me some water."

How pretty Mother was. . . Her long black hair brushed down the sides of her face, clasped at her nape, and let fall over her shoulder and down her left breast. Under her shawl, her straight shoulders rose bare from her wide-necked blouse of bleached muslin, full sleeved and gathered at her wrists. Her narrow waist was cinched by a wide belt

of dark leather, crisscrossed with scarlet cord. Her skirt of brown wool fell in wide pleats to low on her calves, and her small feet were shod in buskins of soft leather. Klesst wore gold circlets pierced through each earlobe—just like Mother—but Greshha had helped her sew bits of embroidery on her garments, while Mother's were unadorned.

Her mother crossed the tiny room with her quick stride. She caught up the crockery pitcher from the stand beside Klesst's bed, then frowned as it sloshed. "There's water here, Klesst. Why can't you get your own drink?"

Klesst hoped she had not triggered her mother's cold anger. Not when loneliness shadowed her room, and the night was closing over the inn. "The pitcher is so heavy, and my arms feel so weak and shaky. Please, Mother. Give me some water."

Silently her mother poured water into Klesst's cup and placed the blue glazed mug in her hands. Greshha would have held it to her lips, supported her head with her strong arm. . .

Klesst drank thirstily, gripping the cup with both her hands—surprisingly long-fingered for a child's hands. Her great blue eyes watched her mother over the brim—searching her face for anger, impatience. Mother's face was impassive.

The child's febrile lips sucked noisily at the last swallow of water, and her mother took the empty cup from her fingers. She returned it to its place beside the pitcher, then turned to go.

"Please, Mother!" Klesst spoke quickly. "My head—it burns so. Could you place something cool on my head?"

Her mother laid her thin hand over the girl's brow. *Yes, that was so cold. . .*

"I had the bad dreams again, Mother," whispered Klesst, hoping her mother would not leave.

"You have a fever still. Fever brings bad dreams."

"It was that same nightmare."

Mother's eyes were wary. "What nightmare, Klesst?"

Would she get angry? Might she stay beside her if she knew her fear? Klesst dreaded the thought of being alone in the darkness.

"It was the dog again, Mother. The great black hound."

Her mother drew back, folded her long arms under her high breasts. "A great black hound?" she said. "Do you mean a wolf?"

"A giant hound, Mother. Bigger than the bear hounds, bigger than a wolf. I think he's even bigger than a bear. And he's black, all black, even his chops and his tongue. Just his fangs are white. And his eyes—they burn like fire. He wants me, Mother. In my dream I see him hunting along the ridges in the mist, sniffing the night winds for my scent. And I can't run, but he keeps hunting closer, until he's snuffing up to the inn. Then he sees me, and his eyes glow red and freeze me so I can't scream, and his jaws yawn open and I see smoke curling from his fangs. . ."

"Hush! It's only a bad dream!" Her mother's voice was strained.

Klesst shuddered as the memory of her fear crept back again, and she wished Greshha were here to hold her. "And I can see something else walking the ridges. There's a man, all in black with a great black cloak that flaps behind him. A man who hunts with the black hound. I can't see him clear because the night hides him—but I know I mustn't look at his face!"

"Stop it!"

The child gasped and looked wonderingly at her mother.

"Talking about it will only make you have the bad dream again," her mother explained tensely.

Klesst decided not to mention the other strange man who walked through her nightmare. "Why are they hunting for me?" she asked in a frightened whisper. *Dared she ask Mother to stay with her?* She again glanced to see if she were angry.

Her mother's face was shadowed, her lips tight and pale. She spoke in a whisper, as if thinking aloud. "Sometimes when your soul is so torn with pain and hatred. . . It can burn you out inside, so your spirit can never feel anything else. . . And you can think thoughts that are different, turn to paths that you wouldn't. . . before. And later maybe your soul is burned out and cold. . . But the fire of your hatred smoulders and waits. . . And you know there's an evil moon rising—but there's no way to hold it back."

A gust of wind rattled dry leaves against the panes. Outside the lattice window, night was striding over the autumnal ridges.

"How is he?"

Braddeyas shrugged. "Alive, I think, but that's about all. He'll be dead by morning if we don't stop soon."

Weed spat sourly and nudged his horse alongside the wounded man's mount. The man slumped over his horse's neck was huge, but his thick muscled frame was now nerveless, and only the ropes which held him to his saddle kept him from toppling to the mountain trail.

Knitting his fingers in the thick red hair, Weed lifted his head. "Kane! Can you hear me?"

The blood-smeared face was slack and pale; the eyes hidden under half-closed lids. His lips moved silently, but Weed could not tell whether there was recognition.

"Then again, he may not last the night even if we do stop somewhere," Braddeyas commented. "Fever's getting worse, I'd say."

"Kane!"

No response.

"He's been out of it since the fever set in," Braddeyas went on. "And he's lost a lot of blood—still losing some." Absently he scratched the dirty bandages that bound his own hairy forearm. Signs of recent and desperate combat marked each man of their small band.

"I don't like to stop," frowned Weed, assuming Kane's leadership. "They're too close on us to risk it."

Braddeyas drew his cloak tighter about his narrow shoulders. "Kane won't last till morning unless we rest."

"Pleddis won't push on through these mountains tonight," offered Darros, who had ridden back to join them.

"Why won't he?" Weed demanded. "He must know we're only hours ahead of him. The bastard's probably counting his bounty money right now!"

The dark-bearded crossbowman shook his head decisively. "Then he'll be counting it beside a roaring fire. You won't find nobody riding these trails tonight. Not with this moon. A man will risk his life for gold maybe, but not his soul."

Weed glanced toward the rising moon in sudden awareness. The long-limbed bandit was from the island Pellin, and not a native of Lartroxia. Nonetheless, years of raiding along the continent hinterlands had made him familiar with the tales and legends of the Myceum Mountains. He looked at the red moon of autumn and remembered.

"The Demonlord's Moon," he whispered.

"Pleddis will have to make camp," Darros asserted. "His men won't ride past nightfall. He'll have to wait for dawn before he takes up our trail again."

"We can risk a halt then," Weed surmised.

"We've no choice," commented Darros, his jaw set.

The two remaining members of their band, tall Frassos and crop-eared Seth, proclaimed agreement by their grim-faced silence.

"By the red moon of autumn, the Demonlord hunts;

His black hound beside him, he seeks along the ridges,

Hunting blood for demonhound, souls for

"Shut up, Braddeyas!" growled Weed, his ragged nerves overstrung by the creeping sense of fear.

"We ain't going to make camp along the trail, are we?" mumbled Seth uneasily. "Kane's just dead weight, and that's only five of us to wait through the night."

"Any other ideas?" demanded Weed. "Night's coming on fast."

Kane's head did not lift from where he slumped against his horse's neck, but his voice slurred thickly: "Raven's Eyrie."

"What'd he say?" Weed asked.

"Raven's Eyrie," answered Braddeyas, bending close to Kane. He held water to their leader's cracked lips, then shook his head. "Still unconscious. Like he's saving up what strength he has. I've seen him do this before."

"Any idea what he meant?"

"Raven's Eyrie is an inn not far, maybe two miles from here," explained Darros, who knew the region well. "It overlooks the River Cotras and the road that runs along the river gorge. Used to be a major caravanserai, before Kane raided it years back. They never rebuilt the place, and my guess is it's all in ruins now."

Weed nodded. "Yeah, I remember Kane talking about that raid. Must have been about eight years back, because it happened just before I joined him."

"I was there," stated Braddeyas with crusty pride. He had raided these mountains even before Kane had come to them ten years before. His hair was grey-streaked and thinning now, which said something about the man, for the mountain outlaws seldom died in bed.

All too true for the others of Kane's once powerful band—men cut to pieces by mercenary swords when Pleddis circled their camp. This handful had slashed their way through his trap, but three days of desperate flight still found the free-captain close on their heels. Nor was he likely to quit their trail. The Combine cities of Lartroxia's coastal plain had set a high bounty on Kane, and Pleddis meant to claim it.

"If its walls are standing, the inn will give us shelter until dawn," Frassos pointed out. He coughed thinly, wincing as pain shot through cracked ribs.

"You know the way, Darros, then lead us there," Weed decided. "Daylight's just about gone."

"It is that," someone muttered.

Evening was closing over the mountains on great raven's wings. Shadow lay deep beneath the blue-grey pines and frost-fired hardwoods which shouldered over the narrow trail. Darkness hungrily swallowed the valleys and hollows that spread out below them—pools of gloom from which waves of mist rose to storm the wooded slopes and pour over the limestone ridges.

A battered, gut-weary handful of hunted men—ruthless, half-wild outlaws hounded by killers as remorseless as themselves. Shivering in their dirt and blood-caked bandages, they rode on in grim determination, thoughts numb to pain and fear—although both phantoms rode beside them—intent on nothing more than the deadly necessity of flight. Flight from the hired bounty killers who fol-

lowed almost on the sound of their hoofbeats.

They were well mounted; their gear was chosen from the plunder of uncounted raids. But now their horses stumbled with fatigue, their gear was worn and travel stained, their weapons notched and dulled from hard fighting. They were the last. The last on this side of Hell of those who had ridden behind Kane—as feared and daring an outlaw pack as had ever roamed the Myceum Mountains.

No more would they set upon travelers along the lonely mountain passes, pillage merchants' camps, terrorize isolated settlements. Never again would they sweep down from the dark pined slopes and lay waste to villages of the coastal plains—then dart back into the secret fastness of the mountains where the Combine's cavalry dared not venture. Their comrades were dead, fed ravens in a forgotten valley countless twisted miles behind their bent shoulders. Their leader, whose infamous cunning and deadly sword at last had failed them, was dying in his saddle.

They were all dead men.

And night was upon them.

"Thoem! It's dark as the inside of a tomb!" cursed Weed, trying to follow the shadow-hidden trail. He glanced uneasily at the blood-hued disc rising above the ridges of autumn. The moon cast no light this night.

"We're almost there," Darros promised him from the darkness ahead.

Moments later the trail rose over a gap, and he called back, "There it is! And there's lights! The inn hasn't been deserted after all."

Not quite, Weed observed. Even in the thick gloom, he could see that Raven's Eyrie lay half in ruins. The grey stone and black timber structure crouched on the edge of the deep valley below them, rising from a bluff overlooking the River Cotras. By the dimmed rows of windows, Weed noted the main building of the sprawling caravanserai stood at least three stories. The outlying wings of the inn appeared no more than fire-gutted walls. River mist hung over the blackened walls of Raven's Eyrie, and in the darkness below the limestone bluff, the Cotras thundered its unseen rush to the western coast.

Cautiously they urged their exhausted mounts down the twisting path that descended the ridge from the gap. The last grey ghost of twilight died away as they emerged from the pine-buried slope and reached the river road. Though wider than the path they had been following, the river road showed signs of neglect. New saplings speared through its hoof-beaten surface, and older trees reached out from the looming forest on either side. Men and horses had ridden by, and smaller hoofprints marked the passage of an occasional drover—but wagon ruts were few, and these old and eroded. Weed reflected that the depredations of Kane and his men probably explained the near abandonment of this once heavily traveled trace.

In darkness they approached the inn. Only a few of the outbuildings remained standing, but they could catch the smell and soft noises of horses and livestock. Several lighted windows of bull's-eye glass stared dimly toward the road. A pair of smoky lan-

terns hung from beside the front entrance, but the thick timbered door had the look of being bolted. A wooden sign hung out above the lanterns, swinging slightly though the wind was less raking here in the valley. Its paint was charred, and the panel bore blade scars, but Weed could make out the blocky Lartroxian letters: "Raven's Eyrie." On the sign above the letters perched a huge raven, in bas-relief and painted black. Someone had set a bit of red glass into the bird's eye, and lamplight glinted there. The raven seemed to watch their approach.

"How many would you say?" Weed asked Darros, after the other had ridden ahead for a closer look.

"Not very many, by all signs," the crossbowman replied. "Looks like just a few people are keeping the inn going. Them and maybe a few travelers, I'd guess. Strange their dogs haven't scented us."

"Shouldn't be much trouble then." Weed turned in the darkness to give orders. Frassos did not respond when he called his name.

"Frassos?" he called again.

No reply. His riderless horse wandered forward instead.

They conferred in startled bewilderment. Frassos had ridden behind, guarding their rear. No one had heard him cry out; no one had heard the sound of a fall.

"We're all of us done in twice over," suggested Braddeyas. "Maybe he passed out and fell."

"Should we go back and look for him?"

The red moon burned down on them from the misty ridges. Weed shivered under its rosy glow, remembering the mountain legends he had heard of this night.

"Does anyone want the job?"

It was too dark to see their eyes, but Weed sensed that no one met his face.

"If Frassos is all right, he can catch up to us at the inn," muttered Seth. There was no confidence in his voice.

II. A Guest Returns

For the space of a dream, Klesst drifted in the restless sleep of fever. Shaken from her half-sleep by sudden angry stridor, she flung herself free of covers in frightened awakening.

The moon's burning eye stared at her through the rippled panes of her window, and Klesst threw her hand to her lips to stifle an outcry. From below in the inn—angry shouts, splintering clamour of overturned benches, a raw scream of pain.

Had the black hound at last found her! Had it broken past the door! Was it even now climbing the stairs to her room!

But the angry voices continued. The words were indistinct to her, but their tone was clear. Now more curious than afraid, Klesst decided she must see what had happened.

Dizzily she dropped her feet to the floor, held fast to the oak bedstead until steadiness returned to her limbs. The night's chill pierced her thin cotton shift, and she hurriedly wound about her shoulders the woolen coverlet Greshha had woven for her. For the moment her fever had left her, and though suddenly cold, she felt a certain shaky strength in its wake. Her teeth chattered; the

fire in her room had almost died, and no one had filled the woodbox.

The angry shouts had subsided by the time Klesst tiptoed down the narrow hallway to the balcony overlooking the inn's common room. Cautiously she crept through the shadows to the pine log railing, and peered from behind a gnarled post.

She darted back in fear—then, certain that the shadows concealed her, risked a longer glance. Her eyes grew wide with a child's wondering stare.

The front door of the inn was flung open. Cold gusts slanted the lantern flames, spun curled leaves across the threshold. Strangers—wild, dangerous men—had burst into Raven's Eyrie. Death had entered with them.

A burly, black-bearded man held a cocked crossbow; his eyes searched the shadows of the common room, raked the balcony where Klesst crouched closer to the log railing. Another man with gangling limbs and mousy, straw-colored hair brandished a narrow blade of unusual length. He seemed to be in charge, for he snarled commands to someone outside the inn.

The inhabitants of the inn and its few guests stood frozen against the long bar. There was Mother, her expression unreadable, with Selle, the scrawny serving maid, cowering against her. Pot-bellied Cholos, who served her mother as tapster, licked his lips nervously and glanced sidelong at the hulking Mauderas, who kept the stables and saw to such heavy work as was ever done at Raven's Eyrie. Mauderas' eyes were sullen as he pressed a hand to his crimson sodden sleeve. Two guests, apparently drovers, were backed against the bar as well. Another guest, whose green tunic identified him as a ranger, lay crumpled beside an overturned table, a crossbolt through his back.

Bandits! Klesst realized with a shudder, recalling the many lurid tales she had listened in on, safely crouched by the corner of the fireplace. The murderous outlaws who held sway over the mountain wilderness—who had laid waste to Raven's Eyrie one awful night before her birth.

There was a disturbance at the door. Two more bandits appeared, staggering under the burden of a third man. One was a wiry figure, partially bald and gap-toothed, though his hair was barely greyed. The other was a husky, swarthy-faced tough with cropped ears and a battered nose. The man they shouldered between them was as large as the two together. His clothes were filthy with dirt and caked blood; matted red hair hung over his bearded, brutal face. Klesst remembered the stories she had heard of ogres and trolls that were said to haunt the mountains, lairing in hidden caves and creeping forth at night to pull down travelers and steal little girls from their beds.

Klesst had thought the big man unconscious. But as the outlaws supported him into the room, his knees suddenly straightened, and she heard him rasp, "I'll sit over there."

Somewhat impatiently he pulled free of their grasp and half fell onto a low-backed oak chair next to the fire. The crop-eared bandit righted the overturned table and shoved it before him, while the blond pro-

cured a thick bottle of brandy from the trembling Cholos and crossed the room. The red-haired giant mutely accepted the bottle and tilted it to his lips for a long swallow. When he thudded it to the table, the dark green glass was empty to half its depth.

Gingerly he brushed the tangled strands of hair from his face, and settled his wolfskin cloak about his shoulders—his manner at once domineering. Fresh blood soaked crude bandages along the slashed side of his leather hacton, and a crusted wound on his scalp had streaked his face with dried blood. Beneath the rust of beard and caked gore, his face was white with fever.

His eyes seemed to glow with a strange blue light by the fire. Perhaps it was the fever. Almost casually his gaze wandered about the room, touched the shadowed balcony where Klesst crouched. For an instant his eyes met hers, and Klesst froze with fear. There was something unnatural about his eyes, she instantly realized—and something familiar. But while he must have seen her, his gaze did not pause in its quick surveillance of the common room.

Instead his stare halted on her mother's face. Thoughtfully he studied her, as if searching for a memory.

"Good evening, Ionor," he greeted her then.

Mother's lips were a tight line, and Klesst could sense the tension in her unsmiling face. "Hello, Kane," she whispered, and quickly turned her eyes from his stare.

Klesst sucked in her breath, recognizing Kane from the countless tales she had overheard of the dread bandit leader. No wonder they stood frozen in fear at the bar. . .

Then she heard Kane ask, "Weed, did you check to see if there was anyone else in the upstairs rooms—other than that kid up there by the railing?"

The lanky blond outlaw started to reply, "Just checked the outbuildings so far—going to search the inn right now. They said there wasn't anybody else here. . ."

"Be certain," ordered Kane. "And stick that kid in bed."

But Klesst had already fled to her room.

"How are you feeling?" asked Weed, more than a little surprised that Kane had regained consciousness. But then there always seemed to burn some last reserve of strength within his huge body.

Kane grunted noncommittally. "Damn fever comes and goes. Hard to know where I am part of the time. Could swear I wasn't wounded that bad—unless that quarrel was poisoned."

"Ought to have Braddeyas clean that hole in your side, put on a fresh dressing. Likely it's all festered along your ribs."

"Later maybe. Don't want to start it bleeding again." Kane rubbed his forehead wearily, wiping away dried blood and greasy trickles of sweat. "Feel stronger once I get some food down—catch some sleep. Can't spare more than a few hours—Pleddis can't be far back."

"Figure we can risk it here till dawn. Darros says Pleddis will have to camp. Demon-lord's Moon tonight." Weed paused, then added: "We lost Frassos coming down the

ridge.”

“No point looking for him,” Kane concluded simply. “Not this night.”

Seth came stomping down from rooms overhead. “Nobody else here,” he reported. “Just a skinny girl, and I locked her in her room. Second floor’s pretty near empty, but there’s a big room with a fire going on the third.”

Kane nodded. It was hard to concentrate, and he could feel his strength ebbing once more. “Put a guard where he can watch outside, Weed,” he ordered. “Another man stay awake to watch things here. There’s a big storeroom past the kitchen there. Tie the men and lock them inside it—no point killing them if they stay in line. Toss that body in with them.

“Leave the women to clean up this mess. Doubt if anyone else will come along tonight, but if they do, we don’t need to give alarm the instant they walk in. Then they can put together some food for us. Watch them closely though.”

His eyes returned to Ionor’s drawn face. “But you wouldn’t try to poison me, would you, Ionor.”

“It’s a cleaner death than I’d wish for you, Kane,” came her strained reply.

“Bring me another bottle,” Kane told her mockingly. “And one of those hens I smell roasting.” Grudgingly she complied. Kane watched the sway of her body as she stiffly came toward him; memory of her drew his lips in a cold smile.

“Sit down,” he said. Since it was not an invitation, Ionor sat down across from him, taking the chair his boot dragged forward.

“Are your memories so bitter, Ionor?”

Her voice was cold, drained of anger—deceptive, for hate edged its timbre. “You and your bandits raided my father’s inn, slaughtered our guests, murdered my family, looted and set fire to Raven’s Eyrie. You gave my younger sisters to your men to rape until death was a mercy! I could hear their screams even as you had your way with me. I can still hear them. No, Kane! Bitter is too sweet a word for the memories I have of you!”

No emotion touched Kane’s pallid face. “Shouldn’t have run off on me like you did,” he said, dividing the roasted fowl with curious delicacy. “I could have made you forget that night.”

His eyes seemed to wander from focus, and Ionor smiled inwardly to see the fever that racked his giant body. “Nothing will ever erase that night!” she whispered.

A rough hand squeezed her shoulder and drew her from her seat. “Bring food for us,” growled Seth, his mouth stuffed with meat he had scooped up from the dead ranger’s plate.

“We’ll talk more later perhaps,” Kane called after her. Her shoulders tensed, but she made no reply.

“Want some opium?” queried Braddeyas, once they had secured the men in the storeroom. “It’ll take the sting out of your side to where to you can sleep good. You’ll need your strength.”

“I can sleep,” mumbled Kane, swallowing a mouthful of brandy. “Don’t want to dull my wits with Pleddis likely to catch us before the next ridge.” His chin declined slowly

toward his chest.

Then he jerked his head erect and stared fiercely about him. “Bring my sword in from my saddle!” he demanded. “Pleddis on our necks, and I sit here like a besotted lord at his wedding feast. This is no time to sleep! Fix me a pipe to hold me awake.”

Weed signed insistently to Braddeyas, and the broken-toothed outlaw began to fill a pipe with coarse tobacco—secretly stuffing a large crumb of opium into the bottom of the bowl. He lit the pipe with a wood splinter and handed it to Kane.

Darros reappeared at the door, carrying Kane’s long sword in one hand, while he hastily drew the bolt with his other. “Thoem! I don’t like that mist!” he muttered, not voicing his true thoughts.

Kane took the strangely hilted blade from him and rested the scabbard against his leg. His fingers touched it, sensed its strength. Steel knew neither pain nor exhaustion, and its only fever was the warmth of an enemy’s blood. Kane wished such unfeeling strength were his, for he was desperately tired, and he dared not rest. His vision blurred and cleared with the throbbing of his skull. “I’ve gone into battle in worse shape than this,” he said defiantly, drawing at the harsh smoke that passed so easily into his lungs.

When the pipe was out, Weed took it from his relaxed fingers. Kane’s slumped head did not lift from his chest; his breathing was slow and regular, his eyes closed.

“He’ll rest better like this,” explained Weed. “Let’s get him to a bed. Did you say there was a place ready upstairs?”

Staggering under Kane’s weight, Seth and Darros hauled their unconscious leader up the narrow stairway to the inn’s topmost floor. There a common room had been prepared for several for the guests; a fire burned on its hearth, and a straw-ticked bed was covered with a quilted blanket. They stretched Kane across the bed and threw the quilt over him.

“Go on and get some rest,” advised Weed. “Braddeyas and I will take first watch.”

He waited until they had quit the chamber, then bent over Kane’s ear. “Kane,” he whispered, “Kane, can you hear me?”

Kane made a noise in his throat that might not have signified anything.

Frowning, Weed bent closer. “Where did you hide it, Kane? Remember? You always cached part of your share of the loot. Where did you take it, Kane? You can tell me, Kane. I’m your friend. We’ll find your cache and use it to escape. We can live like lords in some other land. Where is it, Kane?”

But the other man seemed too deep in sleep.

Sadly Weed rose from his side. “At least don’t die and leave all that gold to rot,” he begged.

Opening the lattice window a few inches—for the room was warm, and Weed feared this would increase Kane’s fever—he wearily left to join Braddeyas.

III. Ravens Fly by Night

A shower of sparks started up from the fire and disappeared into the black cavern of the chimney. Weed grunted and shoved again

with the poker, wedging the new logs closer to their charred predecessors. Perhaps the fire would burn brighter now. The huge fireplace of limestone blocks occupied most of one end of the common room. It should have warmed the entire area; instead its flames crawled dispiritedly over the smouldering logs, and an unseasonable chill for autumn crept through the room.

Wiping his hands he turned from the hearth to gaze once more through the window. Though the full moon was rising higher above the ridges, thick mist rolled from the Cotras to cloak the valley beyond. There was little to see as Weed squinted through the whorled panes; only the neglected grounds of the inn, the leaf-paved roadway beyond. Above the doorway, the signboard swung with the wind. Its hinges squawled like a raven’s croak, and against the inn’s lights it flung a swaying shadow across the frosted earth—like the shadow of raven’s wings.

He examined the bolted door. There should be a man posted outside, he realized. Even on this night, even though Pleddis was certainly camped a safe distance back on their trail. Again he thought of Frassos’ strange disappearance. It was not a night to venture beyond the security of bright lights and locked doors. Even as a stranger to these mountains, Weed sensed the presence of evil abroad beneath Demonlord’s Moon.

Gloomily he sank onto a bench, his eyes toward the door. Behind him he could hear sounds from the kitchen. The warm smell of roasting fowl carried from the cooking area beyond the bar. Braddeyas kept watch on the two women. Once food was prepared for the ride before them, the women could be bound and locked in with the others. Then perhaps he could get Braddeyas to stand guard outside the inn.

Weed dug his fingers into his eyes, more savagely than need be, for sleep was numbing his senses. Braddeyas might refuse. Weed wouldn’t blame him; he doubted that he would accept the risk either. And while Weed was second in command now, Braddeyas had been with Kane too many years to be bullied into obedience by the younger outlaw.

The noises from the kitchen seemed farther away, almost melodious. The fire was burning better now, and he could feel its heat on his side. Weed slapped his face stingingly, fighting off the deadly fatigue. Perhaps he should walk about the room.

Maybe he should walk through the door, mount his horse and ride out. One man would stand a far better chance of escaping pursuit. Let Pleddis overtake Kane and the others. Kane was the reason for his relentless pursuit; he would not bother to press on after one bandit. The price on Weed’s head was tempting for a single bounty hunter, but Pleddis had to pay his men; economics would save him. And yet, Kane might well win free. The bandit leader had done the incredible time and again before this. Perhaps Kane could elude the arrows of fate once more.

Weed felt a certain loyalty to Kane. He had fought beside Kane, followed his commands—and Kane had proved to be a highly capable and generous leader. Indeed, in the

final battle Weed and the others had broken through Pleddis' ambush on the savage force of Kane's charge through the mercenary ranks. But Weed felt a greater loyalty to his own neck, and it appeared certain that Kane would never again hold power over the Myceum passes. There remained the secret cache of loot that Kane had hidden away—against a disaster such as this. At present Weed's possessions consisted of a sore-hooved mount, a notched sword and his battle-torn gear. If Kane would lead them to his cache. . .

The sweet-smoke scent of roasting hens wrapped about him—watering his mouth, though his belly was warm with wine and meat from the meal just eaten. His head fell downward onto his arms. He should get up before sleep claimed him.

And he did rise to his feet. Or he seemed to see his body stand, pace about the room, peer through the fogged bull's-eye panes. The shadows seemed to creep and hover in grotesque patterns as he paced. . .

With a sudden jarring crash, Weed fell to the floor.

In an instant of confused panic, he thrashed free of the overturned bench and tried to regain his feet—thinking dully that he had rolled off in his sleep. Then he became aware of the jeering face above the swordpoint leveled at his throat. Weed froze.

"Now there we went and woke him up," grinned Pleddis.

Weed swallowed and waited for death. Many hands jerked him to his feet, tore away his sword and dagger. A dozen or more of Pleddis' men were pouring into Raven's Eyrie—entering through the kitchen, where Braddeyas lay with a split skull. A sudden uproar, fierce but quickly stilled, echoed across the inn as the mercenaries burst in on Darros and Seth. They died where they slept.

Weed sweated. Pleddis' blade glinted before his throat.

The mercenary captain's face was jubilant, but his eyes were like the edge of his sword. "Where's Kane?" he demanded softly.

Scarcely comprehending that disaster had so swiftly overtaken them, Weed stood silent, swaying back from the blade. His mouth was dry.

"You got half a minute to tell me. And you've just about used that up."

Ionor appeared from the kitchen. Her face was flushed and her blouse disordered. "They carried him upstairs," she announced, hatred bright in her voice. "I'll show you where."

"Carried?"

"He's wounded near death by the look of his side. He couldn't walk."

Pleddis smiled like a wolf at her words. "By Vaul, you were right about your aim, Stundorn! I'll double your share if it sure enough was your quarrel that brought the devil low. Quickly now, show us!"

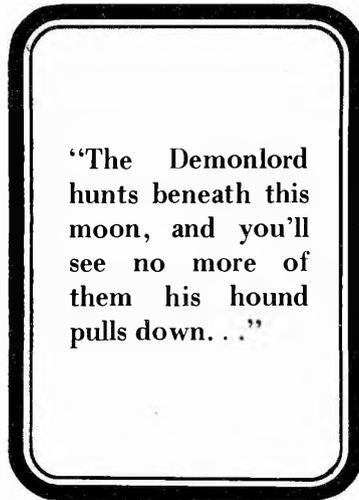
Leaving Weed under guard, the captain and a number of his men followed Ionor up the stairs to the third level. Triumphant she led them to the door of the room where Kane had been taken. Pleddis' smile split his leathery face. Inside this room lay the object of his pursuit, the successful conclusion of a dangerous campaign. And a bounty that would leave him a wealthy man.

Knowing Kane's cunning, their weapons were poised for whatever last trick he might have left. In the darkness outside, others of his men surrounded the inn. Kane would not escape. But even with a crippling wound, they feared the savage power of his sword.

Sucking in his breath, Pleddis kicked open the door. It was unlocked. Slammed back against the wall.

Only silence met them. Kane lay sprawled across the bed, unmoving. A chill wind eddied through the open window. Blood stained the blankets. Kane's arms lay at his sides, in the attitude in which his men had left him. His face was turned to one side; a tiny pool of dampness trickled past his partly opened lips. In the flickering firelight his face seemed unnaturally lax and pale.

Wary of tricks, Pleddis approached the bed. Kane did not move. Only when he reassured himself that no weapon lay near did Pleddis touch the silent figure. Kane's skin was cold as a snake's. Almost impatiently the captain shook his still form, found his body unnaturally rigid. Frowning he felt for a pulse—then held his blade before the motionless nostrils. No moisture fogged the cold



steel.

Pleddis stood up, almost with an air of disappointment.

"He's dead."

IV. Hounds and Carrion Crows

Weed slumped against a table, his arms tightly bound behind his back, his mind seeking desperately for some hope of escape. With a sick chill in his belly, he realized his position was without hope. And cutting through the dull panic was the agonizing thought that he had thrown away his life to stay with a dead man.

Pleddis' men filled the common room—warming themselves with fire, food and drink, excited congratulations. He had pulled them all inside when it was evident that the bandits had been taken; they had rushed into the inn as if it were the last refuge against the mist-shrouded night. Maybe it was. There were more than twenty men milling about the room, wearing the motley gear of mercenary soldiers. With their stamping and loud laughter, they sounded like hunters just come in from a grueling and successful

hunt. From their impersonal stares, Weed felt like a snared fox, surrounded by a pack of baying hounds.

Seated by the fire, Pleddis was in high spirits. He drank wine from a sloshing cup and accepted the applause of his men, his weathered face almost flushed. There was little enough color to the man. His skin was pale and seamed, bleached instead of tanned by wind and sun. His hair was close-cropped and grey, his face cleanshaven; his eyes were of a peculiar washed-out blue so as to appear grey. He was of average height, but compactly built, giving him a deceptively stubby appearance. Gear of worn leather and chain mail tunic were nondescript as his person—and the same faded grey. But his teeth were straight and white, and he flashed them in a broad smile when he laughed, which was often—a rapid, mirthless bark.

He was laughing now.

"A fine last stand for Kane and his fearsome band of killers, eh? Trapped like rabbits in a hole, sleeping like they was in their mother's arms. One man snoring at his post, the other so busy trying to get under the mistress' skirts that he never noticed she's unlatched the woodshed door to the outside. Vaul, what dreadful desperadoes! I'm going to feel silly asking for the bounty on the likes of you! But I'll still ask!" His men joined in his laughter.

Pleddis gulped down his wine, his shrill laugh muffled against the cup. "Of course, you must have figured Captain Pleddis would lie low tonight, sit sivering at his campfire, jumping every time an owl screamed. Did you now? Sure you did. You really thought I'd quit a trail not hours cold, and after three days of chasing after you! Well, I grew up on Thovnos, so I guess I didn't hear all the gruesome tales of Demonlord's Moon you mountain people like to shudder over. Same goes for most of my men—though some of them had their worries about riding on."

His face turned grim, and he stared contemptuously over their ranks. A number of them avoided his eyes. "But it wasn't too hard to make them see that a pack of devils was a better risk than crossing Pleddis, eh?" He laughed again.

"Huh! What about the two men we lost getting here?" grumbled a mercenary from the rear, who quickly ducked from Pleddis' searching scowl.

"You'll not see them again," a husky voice told them. "The Demonlord hunts beneath this moon, and you'll see no more of them his hound pulls down."

Pleddis made an annoyed grimace. "Well, he would have found a fat enough morsel in you, old woman."

"Greshha!" There was a strange hint of anger in Ionor's voice.

The older woman crept almost guiltily from behind the mass of soldiers whose entrance she had followed. The servant's plump cheeks were still ashen with fear, and she blinked and trembled as if dazed.

"So she does belong here," said Pleddis. "We found the old woman hanging back along the road. Seemed so glad to see us she came running into our arms. Couldn't talk two words of sense—something had her bad scared. Now I see it was her own bogey tales."

"She's a servant here," explained Ionor in a tight voice. "She had been given the night off, and I had supposed she would spend it with friends in the village near here." She jerked her hand toward the kitchen, and Greshha dumbly followed her gesture.

Meanwhile Eriall, one of Pleddis' lieutenants whose face Weed knew, had carried in a grisly burden. "Here they are," he announced, holding out both fists. Clenched by their scarlet spattered hair, three heads dangled from his grip. Their jaws hung loosely, tongues lolling, eyes rolled upward in a fish stare behind half closed lids.

"Recognize your friends?" laughed Pleddis. "Eriall, you're dribbling blood all over your hostess' floor. Where's your manners?"

The other grinned and showed the heads to Weed. "Maybe this piece of shit ought to lick the boards clean."

"Too bad the one's skill is busted near in half," mused Pleddis, mourning a damaged trophy. "Well, pack them good in salt with the others. They bring us five ounces of gold each in Nostoblet, and I doubt the Merchant's League will care if their purchases are a bit damaged in transit. Mind you cut off that earring there."

"Why don't I just take along his while I'm doing the rest?" suggested Eriall.

Pleddis stroked his jaw thoughtfully. "How about that, Weed? Want to ride back to Nostoblet all packed in salt? They set twenty ounces of gold on your head, but maybe they'll pay a little extra if we hand you over intact. You'd rate a public execution all to yourself. Be real nice. Which way do you want it now?"

"Let me kill him," snarled Ionor.

Pleddis considered her gravely. "Blood-thirsty is the lust of a woman," he misquoted. "But I'd like to carry one back alive to Nostoblet—so he can tell everyone there how Captain Pleddis ran them down and made raven food out of the whole damned wolf-pack."

Ionor's face was twisted, her breath fast. Weed thought of a hot-clefted slut who had been cheated of her climax. "Hang him from the railing then for me—I want to watch him die. It's my right. You caught them in my inn. You might still be trailing them if they hadn't stopped here."

Pleddis seemed to be weakening. "They might pay extra if he's alive."

"I've given you food and lodging here," argued Ionor. "The extra gold will be less than payment."

"But you owe me your lives for saving you from Kane's men," Pleddis pointed out. The game amused him.

"Should I add Kane's head to the others?" broke in Eriall.

"Not when they'll pay me five hundred ounces of gold for Kane," Pleddis brayed. "For that I'll bring in the whole carcass. Bad as they want Kane, they'll likely pickle him in brine and put him on display. Bet they could charge admission just to see him. Bet they will, in fact!"

"No, it's cold enough we can sling him over a horse, and he'll last until we can get back to Nostoblet. They won't care what he smells like there. Stundorn, take a few men and drag Kane's body down here. We'll leave

him in the stables where the frost will keep him from getting ripe too fast. Watch that the dogs don't get at him."

They had left Kane where he lay when they found him dead. Several minutes had passed since then, in the confused aftermath of Pleddis' attack on the inn. But now the captain's attention returned to the prize quarry of his hunt. Stundorn and some others disappeared up the stairs.

"Weed, I'm still not sure what to do with you," he continued.

"Hang him," Ionor pleaded, her memory reliving a scene eight years back. A memory of familiar faces turning purple, of limbs thrashing a death dance from an impromptu gallows, while murder-crazed animals roared in laughter below.

"I suppose I can grant the request of a handsome lady," gallantly remarked Pleddis, thinking that his hostess had a definite beauty beneath the harsh mask of hatred.

Weed forced himself to speak with scornful assurance. "Grant it and be damned. I can't hope for any better in Nostoblet. And I'll die with the secret of Kane's hidden cache of loot."

It was a foolish bluff, he realized in panic. But against imminent death, any respite would offer hope.

"Well now..." began Pleddis, his eyes lighting with sudden interest.

Stundorn burst onto the balcony, his bearing totally shaken.

"Kane's gone!" he blurted.

V. To Chase the Dead

Kane breathed a silent curse as his boot slipped from its purchase on the limestone wall. For an instant he swung precariously in the darkness, only the steel grip of his fingers against the stone block saving him from a thirty foot drop to the frosted earth below. The fall might not kill him, but it was crippling height for surety. Grimly he forced his scrambling boot back into a masonry crack, rested his arms from the tearing weight of his massive frame. His great strength now seemed scarcely sufficient to stand upright, and his wounded side was lancing agony—but at least the strain and the chill air had cleared his thoughts somewhat.

From the open window above him, Kane heard the startled shouts of Pleddis' soldiers. Baffled rage flamed within him. He had needed more time to descend the wall of the inn. Weakened as he was, he could never reach the ground before a frantic search revealed him to his enemies. Again his boot slipped as he sought to hurry his descent. The limestone blocks of the inn had been set flush in the wall originally—a precaution against athletic thieves or guests who cared not to settle their accounts. Only because mountain winds and winters had eroded the masonry over the years was Kane able to find purchase—such purchase as there was.

Not even extreme exhaustion and the mists of opium had completely dulled Kane's uncanny senses. The feral instincts that countless times had drawn him from sleep to full awareness of imminent danger had called to him once again. Kane had awakened to the brief clamor of Pleddis' attack, and almost

instantly he had understood his position.

Even at peak condition Kane would have stood no chance against a score of seasoned mercenaries. And he knew he was trapped—knew without wasting a glance outside that a man of Pleddis' capability would have surrounded Raven's Eyrie before thrusting within. In another minute his enemies would be smashing down his door—unless he decided to make a suicidal rush down the stairs, or let an archer pick him off as he scrambled down the outside wall.

A desperate plan came to him then. Pleddis knew he was gravely injured. He would let the bounty hunter find him dead. Any number of risks suggested themselves to him instantly, but plainly there was no other course. Pleddis would lower his guard only if he believed his quarry dead.

It was not too difficult for one of Kane's knowledge. His appearance was ghastly enough for a corpse, and the cold draft through the window coupled with the chill sweat that had seized him would impart a convincing clamminess to his flesh. Over the centuries Kane had delved deeply into all manner of occult studies, and the discipline of imposing mental control over physical functions was known to students far less adept than Kane. For much of their ride, Kane had held himself in near trance to conserve his strength, and now he withdrew his consciousness into a deeper coma—rigidly controlling breath and heartbeat to so low an ebb as to appear lifeless to Pleddis' inspection.

Several minutes after his enemies had quit his bedside, Kane returned to full awareness. He realized he now had only a few minutes to escape—a short interval once Pleddis had ordered his men from their surveillance of the inn. They would celebrate the success of their long hunt; for a moment all would be jubilant confusion. Then for any of a hundred reasons someone would return to the dead man upstairs. By then Kane must be gone.

He had cut it close. Too close. Kane had barely lowered himself through the window when Stundorn entered the room. In another instant their stunned fright would leave them. Someone would peer out the open window.

And he could never reach the ground in time. Quickly Kane took the only course left to him. Another window was close at hand. Recklessly Kane clawed his way to the darkened aperture. Somehow he managed to maintain a hold long enough to rest his weight on the ledge. He pushed at the lattice.

It was secured.

Kane bit his lip and tore a knife from his belt. He jammed its blade into the crack between window and casement. His movements seemed panic driven, but his haste was that of one experienced in his task. In only a few seconds the latch snapped free.

Swinging open the heavy lattice, Kane squeezed through the window. No sooner had his cloak and sword scabbard cleared the ledge, when a shout from close by signalled that someone had looked outside.

"No one on the wall!" a soldier called out.

Kane grinned savagely and glared through the darkness of the room. He was not alone.

A small figure crouched on the room's narrow bed. Her wide eyes were almost luminous as she stared at him—a huge, menacing figure outlined in the moonlight at her window.

"Are you alive?" she whispered. His appearance was supernatural, and she had been listening to the shouts outside her door.

Kane made no comment. He had swung into the child's room, and he remembered that the door was locked from the outside. His dagger still shone in his hand. "Don't make a sound!" he hissed.

Klesst's voice was grave. "I won't tell them you're here," she said, "Father."

"I remember one time down along the coast," Pleddis said, staring into the empty room. "It was late fall, and we were making camp for the night. Dragging in drift wood for a fire, and one of the outfit hauls loose a big snag—and there's a swamp adder thick as your arm, all laid out and sluggish with cold. Kid was from the coast, knew what he had, so he just laid into it with the stick of wood he was carrying—not even wasting time to pull his sword. Must of hit it fifty times, till the stick was busted and the snake half flattened out. Had to be dead; we didn't think anymore about it.

"Long about the end of the second watch we all woke up—Vaul, it was a scream to chill your guts! There was the kid flopping out of his blanket roll, that damn black snake with its fangs buried in his neck. Hell, its head was bigger than your fist and full of venom, and I don't guess the kid lived long enough for us to stir up the fire.

"After that night I never trusted a dead snake. Always hack them to chunks, no matter how dead they look. Except just now," he concluded bitterly.

"He can't of got far," Eriall judged. "Hadh't had no time, and crippled up like he was."

Pleddis grunted and inspected the window casement. Lanterns flashed from the ground below. "What do you see?" he called down.

Nattios bawled back, "Nothing. No marks below. We're looking along the wall."

The mountaineer was no fool at tracking, Pleddis knew. "Well, look closer. There's blood on the ledge here."

"No. Nothing," came the reply after a pause.

"There's rocks down there," Eriall said, craning his squat neck to look down.

"Yeah, and there's frost too," Nattios retorted gruffly. "Good as sand for leaving tracks. Ain't nothing."

"Well, Kane couldn't have crawled down that wall anyway," the stocky lieutenant declared. "Man that big couldn't scale these stones even if he wasn't busted up. The blood's a false trail."

Pleddis' laugh returned. It was not pleasant. "Kane could have done it. He's not lying in bed there. He either went out the window or out the door. I got men at every exit, so if there's no tracks outside he has to be hiding inside. Won't do him any good, because we'll find him."

"Could be he got out somewhere else, mixed his trail in with our tracks," Eriall persisted. "We came in from all around the sides, you know."

"Could be. But I figure Kane didn't have the time to do anything too fancy. He's hiding in here somewhere. If he's not, we'll pick up his trail with the dogs they got here. Long as we keep him from the horses he won't get far."

Stundorn's stubbled face was strange. "Captain, you're sure he was just faking he was dead then?"

Pleddis glared at him. "Dead men don't run out on you." Abruptly he scowled. "Unless some bastard slipped back and stole the corpse for the bounty!" He thought carefully. "No, I can account for all of us—and for the bunch that stay here too. Still, if I find some bastard's pulling a fast one, there's going to be one more head in that salt pack, and it won't cost the Merchants' League a copper!"

But Stundorn remembered that his quarrel was supposed to have given Kane his death wound. "All the same, captain—it's the Demonlord's Moon. They say his powers hold sway over the mountains tonight. Maybe he could make the dead rise. And there's all kinds of black legends about Kane. We may be trailing a dead man, captain."

Pleddis stood a moment, face impassive. Then his laugh barked rustily. "Maybe so, Stundorn. But you just remember that corpse is worth five hundred ounces of yellow gold, and if he comes looking for you, just yell for me."

"Father!" exploded Kane, in a louder tone than he intended. He crossed the room to the girl's bed.

"Yes," Klesst whispered. "I saw you come in, and they said you were Kane. The children in the village call me Kane's bastard. They say you carried Mother away after you raided the inn, and after she escaped and came back she had me, and you were my father."

Kane stared at her.

"See. I have red hair like yours, and my eyes are blue like yours." Klesst did not flinch from Kane's stare. "I can even see in the dark better than the other children, like the stories about you."

"Your grandmother," Kane muttered, touching the child's face.

"So I won't tell those soldiers where you are," Klesst concluded.

"You should hate me." Her skin was feverish. As was his.

"No," declared Klesst. "The others hate me. But when they hear stories about you, then they look frightened. I like to see them frightened. I like to think they're even a little frightened of me."

Kane shook his head. The excited shouts of his pursuers brought him back to the moment. Turning from her, he risked a glance through the window. Outside they were circling the inn with torches and lanterns. He knew they would find no trail. Then they would begin to search the inn. Digging grime from his boots he smudged over the bright scratches made by his knife on the latch. There was no smear of blood on the casement that he could see.

Grimly he took stock of his chances. They were not good. All that his ruse had accomplished was to give him another few minutes. The end was inevitable, unless he could slip

through their net. And even then. . .

Kane forced his mind to think clearly. For the moment the threat of certain death had spurred him from exhaustion. Some final reserve of strength kept him moving when he should lie senseless—pushed back the black waves of fever and opium. The barricades must soon break.

"I knew you from my dream," his daughter told him. "But then I didn't know your name."

About to warn her to be silent, Kane stopped. "How can you dream of someone you've never seen?" he wondered, somewhat in awe of the child. Seeing her brought memories that he cared not to linger upon just now.

"I saw you," Klesst insisted. "And another man, all in black, with a great black cloak. He has a great black hound. . ."

Kane frantically signed for her to be silent. A number of men were coming down the hall. They were searching the rooms.

Kane's hand reached over his right shoulder, and the ancient blade of Carsultyal steel silently swung from its scabbard. It was a good weapon, Kane thought with grim pride. This one had been difficult to find—probably few like it still existed. Carsultyal lay buried by sand and time. And the ancient city's last citizen would very shortly lie dead with its memory.

Again he glanced outside. They were watching from below. The soldiers in the hall—he might kill the first group to enter. But there were more to take their place, and Kane was trapped—wounded so that his last fight would not even be a good one.

The door was locked from the outside. And there was Klesst. It might make them less thorough in their search—they would likely assume the child would cry out if Kane had somehow hidden inside her room.

A futile hope probably. And the room was too small. Kane assumed it was one of the narrow single rooms for wealthy travelers who deigned not to share quarters with other guests. Such accommodations cost dear and were cramped—but at least a well-to-do traveler would not have to share a bed with three hog drovers.

The search was only a few doors away.

And there was no place to hide. Just a bare timbered room. No chests, no tapestries—Kane's huge frame could never squeeze under Klesst's tiny bed. There was a closet. That in itself marked the room as once a luxury accommodation. Kane swung open its door. The closet was surprisingly large, considering the economy of space that an inn demanded. An oddly dank smell came from within. A few nondescript items of clothing hung from pegs along the interior.

It was worth a chance. At any event, Kane decided, when they opened the door he would hurl himself out, with luck cut down a couple of them before they could meet his rush. It was better than standing there like a condemned man in the middle of his death cell.

"What's your name?" he asked suddenly.

"Klesst."

"Well, Klesst, I'm going to step inside your closet. I want you to pull this latch down from outside, and then get back in bed.

When the soldiers come in, just tell them no one's been in here. And if they don't believe you and look inside—well, afterward you can tell them that I said I'd hurt you unless you did as I told you."

Klesst nodded, impressed by the important task he had given her. She smiled uncertainly as she shut the closet, then quickly shot the latch. She barely had time to scurry back to bed before they came to her door.

"This is the kid's room," someone observed. "Been locked."

"Well, open it anyway," ordered a gruff voice.

A scraping of bolt, then suspicious faces peered in from the hall.

The gruff voice belonged to a paunchy man with thick shoulders and a rolling gait. He carried an arbalest, his fingers near the trigger. "Hey, kid," he demanded. "Anybody come in here?"

"No sir," Klesst said, being polite to make him trust her.

Their eyes carefully searched the shadows of the room.

"You sure?"

"Yes sir."

"You been awake?"

"Yes sir."

"You sure you ain't been asleep?"

"No. . . I mean, yes sir."

The man with the arbalest entered the room. Several other men followed. Swords were bare in their fists.

A thin-faced mercenary examined the window. "It's locked, Stundorn. No sign of blood or anything," he stated in a nasal voice.

Stundorn shifted his arbalest. Klesst wondered why the steel bow didn't snap its string. "Might have been open before. This room is below Kane's, off to the side only a little. He might have climbed down."

He frowned at Klesst. "You see anything, kid?"

"No sir."

"You wouldn't lie now, would you?"

"No sir."

"Do you know what happens to little girls who lie?"

"Yes sir." Klesst's imagination grappled with the possibilities.

"And you haven't seen any sign of a big bandit with blood just pouring down his ribs where I shot him?"

"No sir."

"Closet's latched from outside," someone noted.

"Now you aren't hiding my bandit inside your closet, are you?" Stundorn rumbled.

"No sir." *What did happen to little girls who lied?*

"Do you know I got an itchy nose?"

"No sir."

"It's a fact. My nose itches every time I hear a lie."

Klesst stared in horrid fascination.

"Now why do you suppose it's itching right now?"

"I don't know, sir," she answered shakily.

Stundorn stood back from the closet door. He brought his arbalest to his shoulder, sighted about chest height on the door. His fingers curled over its trigger.

"Now open that door, Profaka," he directed the thin-faced mercenary.

Gingerly Profaka reached across to the latch, drew it back.

He yanked open the door.

The closet was empty.

"This place is clean," Eriall informed his leader. "Been through it from attic to cellar, looked in every hole bigger than a chamber pot. Ain't no Kane, and that's a fact."

Pleddis nodded tiredly. He had overseen most of the work. "Yeah, and no one made a break for outside; I had men out there watching every block of stone on this inn."

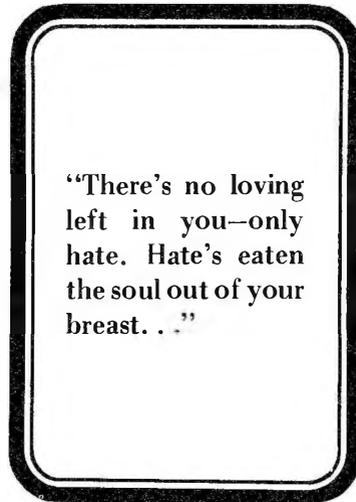
The captain banged his fist on the wall in anger. "Obviously then, Kane somehow got outside before we realized his trick."

"But how! We pretty well proved he had to be inside."

"Well, we damn well just proved he's not inside! Now you tell me where that leaves us!"

Eriall was silent. He massaged his shaven skull. Pleddis' laugh startled him.

"Sure, I know what he did!" His white teeth flashed in a grin. "You just got to think like Kane thinks. Now Kane's smart and he's got a lot of tricks. He went out the window,



sure—but he didn't climb down. That's what he knew we'd think he'd do. So instead Kane climbed *up!* He was on the top floor, so getting to the roof was actually easier than climbing all the way to ground.

"Kane must have worked his way along the roof up to where it abuts the burned out north wing. Then he just climbed down onto the old walls and groped his way down into the gutted interior, and slipped through the rubble and into the night—while we were standing like fools wondering where his body had got to!"

"Then he's had a good start all this time we been looking under beds!" Eriall growled.

"Maybe," Pleddis admitted, still pleased with his cleverness. "But Kane don't have a horse. Wounded and on foot we'll run him down in an hour. Nattios! Find Ionor and tell her we'll need dogs for tracking! Hurry! What's the matter!"

"We're going to track Kane now?" the mountaineer queried uneasily. "It will soon be midnight. The Demonlord will hunt. . ."

"Move, damn you!" Pleddis hissed. "Yes, we're going to track him! Do you want the Demonlord to catch him! Lord Tloluvn

don't need that gold!"

"Don't speak his name!" Nattios gasped. Seeing the vicious anger rise in Pleddis' eyes he ran to find Ionor.

VI. In Seven Years You'll Hear a Bell. . .

Ionor turned on Greshha with thinly checked fury. "Why did you come back! I told you to take tonight off."

They were alone in the inn's great kitchen. Shouts close by told of Pleddis' fast moving search of the rambling structure. The two drovers had joined in, and Ionor had ordered Cholos and Mauderas to help the mercenaries—even directing Sele to guide the searchers through the huge inn. Ionor felt certain Kane would be found if he were hiding within the walls of Raven's Eyrie. If not. . .

Her jaw tightened as she scowled at the older woman. "I said, why didn't you stay away!"

The servant woman took a deep breath. Her thick body shook. "I guess I know you didn't want me here," she mumbled, face downcast.

"What did you say?"

Greshha raised her chin; her eyes were shrewd. "I guess I know why you wanted me to stay away tonight," she stated in a louder voice—defiantly.

A hiss escaped Ionor's tightly drawn lips. She started to swing back her hand, then checked her arm. "What are you talking about!" Her voice was like a slap.

"I'm no fool. I can remember," Greshha stolidly told her. "I know you hate the child."

Ionor's long fingers clenched and opened, like a pantheress flexing her claws. She tossed her head, and her loose braid flicked over her shoulder, twitched down her back like an angry black tail.

The stout mountain woman did not quail before her mistress' obvious look of menace. "Poor Klesst. I can't blame you for hating her when she came. But after all these years! I kept taking care of her when it was your place, hoping you'd learn to love her. But you never did, Ionor. There's no loving left in you—only hate. Hate's eaten the soul out of your breast, so you can't even love your own flesh. . ."

"Shut up, you fat fool! I've tolerated your meddling, but you've overstepped your place this time!"

"I never thought you'd go through with it. All this time I kept thinking you'd soften to her. But you're cold, burned out, Ionor. There's no heart left in you. I know now you mean to do it."

Ionor drew back against the cutting table, her lips twisted in a snarl. "What are you talking about!"

Ducking her head for breath, Greshha plunged on. Her round face took an aspect of sullen determination. "I was here when you were birthing her, don't forget. I stayed with you when your screams and curses drove everyone else from your bed. I held you down and tried to comfort you when the midwife had to use the knife to bring her forth from your womb. And even while you screamed out things to make the gods turn away from you, I stayed with you, and pitying you because no one thought you could

live through the night.

"Seven years ago tonight, it was, Ionor. And they all said it was a miracle when both you and the child lived through. But only I knew what kind of miracle it was."

"You're an old fool, Greshha!"

"Old, but no fool. The things you were screaming weren't good to cry out—not with the Demonlord's Moon shining down through your window. They weren't good to hear, and that's why the others drew away from you that night. I'll confess it, I was afraid myself—and when the child was born, and the midwife had done what she could, and we thought the opium would let you ease into sleep. . . Well, I left you too, and told myself to look to the child because her mother would be gone by daybreak.

"Then when the dogs began to howl and cringe, and the others all huddled by the fire and prayed. . . I couldn't leave you alone to die, not when the fires all burned low and blue under the shadows. I crept back to your room, praying each step, and afraid to think what it was we heard snuffling outside the inn.

"And I stopped at your door when I heard your voice, and when I heard that *other* voice answer, I knew who you were talking with, and I knew it was worse than death to open your door. I just froze there too scared to tremble, and the words you two spoke burned into my memory like hot iron into flesh. And after *he* left, I still stood there crying and praying and not making a sound. And when I finally took heart to look in the door, I saw you lying there asleep with a black smile on your lips, and I knew your strength would be back in the morning.

"But before the gods, Ionor, I never thought you'd do it! I swear I would have smothered you there as you lay if I had believed that. I kept thinking, she'll learn to love once she's held the child to her breast, and she forgets the horror and the shame and the pain. But you never held the child to your breast, and you never learned to love her—because all that's left in you is hate, Ionor.

"So I knew why you wanted me gone to-night, and that's why I wouldn't go. And I'll not go. I'll not let you do it."

"You dare meddle old fool!" spat Ionor. "If you dare interfere. . . But what can you do!"

Greshha expanded her shoulders truculently. "There's soldiers here. Captain Pleddis has League authority. He won't let you do this thing."

Ionor laughed. "Pleddis is a cold-blooded bounty killer. His soldiers are hired thugs. He'll not care what I do. He only wants Kane."

"Maybe so. I guess I'll find out what he'll do."

"Don't be a bigger fool!"

"Maybe he'll be interested if I tell him he might not *get* Kane."

"I'm warning you!"

Greshha looked at her livid face and backed away. No longer was there doubt in her mind; instead there was fear. The servant woman started for the door to the common room; she could hear heavy boots approaching from there.

As she turned, Ionor's hand came away

from the cutting table. The sharpening steel in her fist made a rotten crunch as she brought it down over Greshha's skull. The mountain woman crumpled to the floor with no more sound than a dropped sack of grain.

Ignoring the huddled body, Ionor glanced at the door. She had acted out of desperate rage, without forethought. And someone was entering the kitchen.

It was Mauderas. He halted at the threshold in surprise. His hulking figure blocked the doorway; behind him stretched the inn's bar, and beyond she could see several of Pleddis' men moving through the common room.

"Close that door!" she hissed. "Lock it!"

Mauderas obeyed, a stunned expression on his dark face. "What happened?"

"Never mind," Ionor told him. "I had to stop her from talking to Pleddis."

"She dead?"

"I think so. We can't let them find her."

Mauderas licked his mustache and surveyed the room. The outer doors were barred, but Pleddis' men were watching from outside. Fortunately the windows were shuttered on the back wall. No one had seen. . . yet.

"I don't see what Pleddis would care about. . ."

"Don't forget Captain Pleddis is a lawman!" she snapped. "Maybe he wouldn't use his authority, maybe he would. No point in tempting luck. I don't want to fool around with that bounty hunter right now. We'll have to hide her body—tell them she went back to the village, if anyone asks."

"How! She's too big to stuff under something, and Pleddis' men are all over the place. Someone's going to want to come in here any minute. They can't turn up Kane anywhere, and Pleddis was about to tear up the floorboards looking for hiding places."

"I know; they came through here twice before. Does it look like Kane left the inn, then?"

Mauderas nodded. "Pleddis figured out how. They'll be out scouring the ridges next."

Ionor thought carefully for a moment and came to a decision. "Then we'll do it the old way. Take her out the passage and sink her. That way it's certain they won't find her."

Mauderas put a broad hand on her shoulder. "Been a long time since I sunk anyone."

"I feel confident you haven't lost your touch."

"Passage hasn't been opened since the raid. Thought you wanted to forget the old days, keep the passage closed up."

"I know what I said. But I don't want to risk complications with Pleddis."

Mauderas shrugged. "Anyway you call it then, Ionor."

Stooping over the limp body, he arranged the loose limbs with the calm competence of one who knows his task. With a grunt he rose up again, Greshha's lax figure slung across his broad back. "The old woman weighs more than a side of beef," he grumbled.

But Ionor had left him. Descending the steps to the wine cellar, she paused to grasp a portion of the railing. With a sharp tug, the upright swung out from the bannister like a lever. It was a lever. Somewhere below a counterbalance released, and a large section of the flagstone cellar floor rumbled smooth-

ly into the outer wall.

A square of blackness opened in the cellar floor, from which a stale, damp wind swelled up. It was like a breath from some slumbering behemoth. Indeed, the sound of muffled breathing seemed to emanate from within—a distant rushing moan.

Stairs of greasy limestone descended into the gloom. Mauderas took a lamp from Ionor, holding it clumsily under the weight of his burden. He eyed the passage doubtfully.

"Hurry! I think I hear someone calling for me!"

Mauderas grunted and put a boot on the top step. "Oh, I'll hurry. But I'll hurry back to keep you warm tonight."

Ionor made an impatient gesture. "Stay there for awhile before you return to the inn—and leave by the other way. They'll believe me if I say you went to walk Greshha part way to the village. And later no one will question a disappearance on Demonlord's Moon."

"Anyway you call it, honey," Mauderas drawled, his voice rising from the darkness. "I'll be along to keep you warm directly."

Hurriedly Ionor swung the lever back to its upright position. The section of flagstones grated back into place. Pounding on the kitchen door was thunderous as she emerged from the cellar.

"Sorry. I was getting brandy," she explained, unbolting the door to admit Nattios and several of his fellows. "With that devil running loose, a lady likes to keep herself locked in safe."

VII. Raven's Secret

Satisfied that no bones were broken, Kane struggled to his feet. He would limp badly, but his high boots had reinforced his ankles so that the shock of impact had not resulted in a disabling sprain or worse. Or worse. He massaged his aching shoulder; his right arm had almost been torn from its socket. But by all rights he should be lying here with a broken neck.

Kane looked about him, reconstructing what had happened now that the scarlet bursts of pain were receding from his consciousness.

When Klesst had fastened the closet door, Kane had stepped back against its wall. He had a vague impression of reaching to steady himself. His groping fingers closed on something—had it been one of the pegs?—that had swung inward with his shove.

Then the section of closet floor on which he stood dropped away, and Kane felt himself plunging through darkness. Blindly he struck out. His fingers closed on wood—the rung of a ladder. But the rotted wood tore away under the wrenching force of Kane's three hundred pounds of bone and muscle.

Spun about by the jarring contact, Kane desperately clawed at the wall. Other mildewed rungs smashed against his grasp, splintered under his weight. But it was enough to check his hurtling body. Kane's steel-tendon fingers locked onto the flashing rungs, almost bringing his fall short. Then the dragging mass of his body proved more than the weakened timbers could withstand. The ladder tore loose from its anchorage to the wall

and careened to the stones below.

It had been enough to break his fall. Kane dropped the final eight or ten feet and struck the stones on his feet, the wreckage of the ladder splintering beneath him.

He lay for several minutes, semiconscious after the stunning impact. Above him stretched a seemingly endless shaft of blackness. Kane had no clear idea of how far he had fallen. He was in a chamber beneath the cellars of Raven's Eyrie. Klesst's room must be at least fifty feet above—probably more, since the sound of his fall seemed to have brought no response from his pursuers.

Patches of skin were abraded from his hands, and he dug out several large splinters. Gingerly he flexed his fingers, found they were otherwise uninjured. A smile twitched his bleeding lips, for a man with crippled hands was more helpless than if he had broken his leg. Casting about, he found his sword—its point buried inches in the damp limestone. He drew it out, reflecting he had narrowly missed being impaled on its tempered steel.

Once more he gazed up the pitch dark shaft. He had triggered a trap door in the rear of the closet, somewhere above. Obviously a counterbalance had sprung the trap shut once again, otherwise he would see light—and puzzled faces would be staring down at him. A ladder was anchored to one wall of the shaft, though it appeared unlikely he would be able to climb back up after the destruction his fall had caused.

Kane had just begun to form a guess as to the shaft's purpose when he heard a grating rumble overhead. Light suddenly washed down from the roof of the chamber some fifty feet to his left. A section of stone had slid open, revealing a long flight of stone steps. Voices trickled down.

Baring his teeth in a snarl—*had Pleddis' hounds sniffed him out even in this lost hole!*—Kane concealed himself behind a massive stone column. Sword in bleeding fist, he waited.

Instead of the anticipated rush of mercenaries, Kane saw only one man descend the steps—and then the door overhead slid shut. His eyes narrowed in calculation. The man he recognized as one of Ionor's servants; the dead woman he carried slung over his back Kane had never seen before. This turn of events was a mystery to him. More to the point, it meant that his presence here had not been discovered—on the contrary, the brawny servant seemed intent on a task which demanded secrecy.

The newcomer carried a lantern in his fist. Its light was hardly sufficient to disclose the walls of the chamber—tens of yards across, and in places shored and vaulted. Evidently the room was a natural cavern which at one time had been roughly restructured to serve as a hidden cellar. A damp breeze ghosted through the darkness, causing the lantern flame to dance, and Kane noted a narrow passage leading out of the cellar's far wall.

Mauderas glanced about the hidden cellar, his face showing more fear than suspicion. This was a place where countless dark crimes had bloodied the stones. It was not a wholesome spot to linger—particularly on the night of Demonlord's Moon.

"What the hell!" he muttered, raising his lantern suddenly. He tensed as the feeble light picked out the splintered ends of the ladder, pointing in all directions like the half flexed fingers of a dead man's hand. The woman's body slid from his shoulders with a heavy flopping sound.

"That wasn't so rotten it would of collapsed by itself," Mauderas thought aloud. Drawing his sword, he shuffled toward the wreckage—the lantern thrust before him like a shield.

Which left him blind to anything outside the close circle of its light. As he crept past, Kane leapt from the shadow of the pillar. Mauderas sensed his rush and started to turn. Kane's heavy blade sheared off half his face as it passed down through his neck.

The lantern smashed against the floor. A pool of flame licked over the damp stone. Grotesque shadows writhed over the nitrefrosted walls, mocking killer and slain, as Kane wiped his blade clean of the dead man's gore.

"Kane. . ." A rasping voice called to him.

He spun on his heels, a curse exploding from his throat.

"Kane. . . Is it you?" the eerie voice whispered.

Kane stalked towards the sound. In the rippling light he saw that the woman Mauderas had carried had raised herself weakly.

He knelt at her side. "I'm Kane," he told her, noting the blood that matted her hair.

Her ashen face was lax; her arms quivered spasmodically. Seemingly she had barely strength left to whisper. "The child, Kane. . . Save Klesst. . . She may be of your seed, but she's innocent."

"Why is Klesst in any danger, old woman?"

"Ionor. . . She birthed her seven years ago tonight. . . Nothing but hate in her. . . She called out to him for vengeance that night. . ."

"Called out to whom?"

"I heard him at her bedside. . . His black hound was clawing at our door. . . The Demonlord came to her. . ."

Only willpower held life in the mountain woman's dying flesh. All strength had left her—only her eyes and lips showed trembling movement, like the final flickering of a lampwick when no more oil remains. Her voice was trailing off, and Kane anxiously bent his ear to her face.

"The Demonlord bargained with her that night. . . In seven years he'd draw you back to Raven's Eyrie. In seven years he'd come with his hound to drag your living flesh down to Hell. Ionor would see her vengeance fulfilled—but the price would be the child. Ionor must take Klesst to Raven's Bald where the Demonlord and his black hound wait. She must give the hell hound your spoor by throwing the child into its maw. . ."

"Then the black hound will come for you, Kane—to drag your evil soul down to everlasting torment in its master's realm. . . and there's no place you can hide from the hound of Hell! It's no worse than you deserve, but the child's done no wrong. Don't let her sacrifice Klesst. . . There's naught but hate in. . ."

Greshha's whisper was no longer audible. Kane shook her still form, intent on learning more. And now her eyes and lips were fixed and silent. As they would be forevermore.

The pool of flaming oil crept into tiny islands of fire, that one by one snapped and died. Kane arose from the dead woman, and the chamber was once more in darkness.

He stood wondering for a moment, while his uncanny eyes adapted somewhat to the thick gloom. Numbness was stealing over his body. Fighting the pain and exhaustion that clouded his perception and dragged at his limbs, Kane limped toward the passage at the opposite wall. The damp and softly moaning breath issuing from the blackness indicated the passage must lead outward and Kane had no desire to return to the inn, even if he could gain entrance without discovery.

The passage was cramped, with walls and floor of irregular masses of limestone. Kane judged that the portions of the rock had been broken away to enlarge the natural tunnel. He had begun to form an idea of the hidden cellar's function, and when he reached the end of the passage, his suspicions were confirmed.

The tunnel opened onto a narrow ledge, jutting midway from the limestone bluff below Raven's Eyrie. The River Cotras rushed thunderously beneath the mists another hundred feet down. Close by the mouth of the passage lay a pile of fist sized stones and broken rubble—harmless enough, but Kane read a more sinister interpretation.

Before the raid, Raven's Eyrie had been a prosperous caravanserai. But Ionor's family had gathered its great wealth by darker harvest than the hosting of trail weary travelers. Kane suddenly realized that he had uncovered the chilling secret of Raven's Eyrie.

Such inns of terror were not rare along desolate roads through untilled wilderness. Kane had encountered them on occasion, although never on so grand a scale as Raven's Eyrie, whose dark secret had never been suspected. He wondered how many other hidden passages opened into guest's rooms—like the one he had unwittingly stood over and tripped. How many black crimes, what heaps of stolen riches, had this hidden cellar known? Studying the cairn of fist sized rocks, Kane thought of the nameless travelers who had been secretly dragged from their beds to this unhallowed cellar—where here, their bellies ripped open and weighted with stones, their corpses were thrown from the ledge to sink forever in the deep current far below.

No doubt their disappearance, if noted, would have been laid to marauding gangs of outlaws—some of the crimes, Kane bitterly reflected, were probably laid to his name. But now the passage showed evidence of long disuse, and Kane wondered why. Did wealthy travelers no longer risk these trails; were their guests too few to disappear without notice? Or was Ionor of a less murderous temperament than her predecessors here? Remembering the hatred in her eyes tonight, Kane doubted this last.

He dismissed the matter; it was of no concern. Instead there was Pleddis to deal with. And the words of the dying woman. Truth or madness? Kane dared not disregard her whispered warning. He knew the power of hate.

Klesst—he must get to Klesst. For the child was the key to the doom Ionor intended for

him. But the ladder in the shaft was hopelessly damaged; even if Kane could somehow bridge the missing section, he doubted that it would bear his weight. And Pleddis held the inn. There were other secret doors, he knew, but it would be impossible to evade detection if he returned to the inn. His escape from there had taken the limit of his strength and guile—and then it was chance that had saved him. He could not hope for this a second time.

Kane's head felt light, dizzy. It was death to get to Klesst. But if he could not reach the child, Ionor would seal her pact with the Demonlord. Then Pleddis and his hired killers would show him far greater mercy than the doom which would certainly claim him.

It was hard to concentrate. Kane's strength ebbed, as pain and fatigue racked his flesh, fever and drug mists swirled through his brain. Raven's Knob, the old woman had whispered—there Ionor was to seal her unhallowed bargain. Kane had a memory of that jutting spur of barren rock and lightning blasted trees. Rising from the bleak crest of a high ridge, it was a landmark in the region—and a setting for any number of dark legends. No sane man would approach Raven's Knob when the Demonlord's Moon rose behind it. Possibly not even Pleddis could force his men to carry their search to its slopes.

Ionor would take Klesst there. Kane knew he must reach Raven's Knob first. But he had no idea how much time remained to him. He had heard Ionor's voice when Mauderas entered the hidden cellar. Very little time had passed. Ionor, however, would take a straight course for Raven's Knob. Kane, weakened and uncertain of the path, must elude Pleddis' searchers in order to reach the point. And the night held dangers far more sinister than mercenary steel.

There was no other way. Cold anger seethed in Kane's heart. He had been driven across the land, ensnared in this deadly web—each step of his course seemingly predetermined. He would not be the blind pawn in some dark game fate played.

The ledge seemed to twist downward at a steep slant from the mouth of the passage. Clumps of laurel anchored to cracks and folds in the almost sheer face of the bluff; their roots held crumbling shelves of soil and broken rock. They were treacherous footholds under the best of conditions—tonight Kane could not imagine worse. Presumably though he could work his way to the river bank along this deadly pretense of a path. If he slipped. . .

There was no other way.

Fighting the weakness that gnawed at him, the vertigo that already blurred his mind, Kane set his boots against the slippery ledge.

VIII. And That Will Be Your Call To Hell. . .

"Stundorn, you know better than to hit an unconscious man," Pleddis told him. "Wait until he comes to again so he can feel it!" He threw back his head with braying laughter.

The paunch-gutted mercenary spat and unworded the cestus from his fist. "May be awhile."

"He'll keep," grinned Pleddis, critically studying Weed's broken face. It took some of the frustrated pain from his belly to pic-

ture Kane hanging there instead.

Weed's battered body slowly spun about. The bandit's arms had been tied behind his back. Then a longer rope had been tied to his wrists, its other end wound around the balcony railing. They had hoisted him above the floor in this manner—his toes only inches from support. While he hung there, his shoulders threatening to tear from sockets, Stundorn had worked him over with the cestus.

"When we come back with Kane, he'll tell us the truth about this cache of loot," Pleddis promised. "Because he knows this is just a taste of what will happen if he lies to us just once. Only way to make a man tell the truth when he expects death in return; you got to make him want to die."

He smiled jovially at Ionor. "Now he *is* going to be alive when I get back, isn't he?"

"This is better than killing him," she said flatly, watching Weed's tortured body as it slowly spun from the force of the last blow.

Pleddis laughed appreciatively. "Don't think I'd want you for my enemy—no, I don't! Well then, we'll let you and that fat tavern keeper guard him close—and your man Mauderas when he comes back. Of course, I've got some of my men posted here inside, in case Kane doubles back—and there's more guarding the horses. Personally, I expect to find him crawling along the mountain side not even a mile from here, but with Kane you best keep all bets covered. He comes back, there's a welcome here for him."

A harried Nattios pounded in from outside. "Captain Pleddis, it's no use!" he blurted. "I can't do a damn thing with them hounds. You got to drag them out of their kennel, and then they just scrouch down on their bellies and whimper. Hell, one damn near chewed old Usporris' arm off trying to drag his tail back inside! They're too scared to piss, Captain. They ain't good for so much as barking at a thief if he was to step over them—ain't no way we're going to use them to trail!"

"So." Pleddis shrugged his shoulders, affecting nonchalance he did not feel. "Then we trail without dogs. Didn't need them before now. I know damn well you can track a man on foot over this short a field."

He glared at the long-nosed mountaineer. "Unless you're too damn scared to do your job. And you and any others who feel that way know what I think about a man who won't do his job."

Nattios nodded unhappily. He knew. They all knew.

"Stundorn—you aren't afraid to chase down a fortune in gold."

"No, captain," he lied, face pale beneath stubble beard.

"See, Nattios. Stundorn's not afraid."

"You find where Kane's trail leads off, I'll take you to him," Nattios promised sullenly.

"I'll hold you to your word." Pleddis' teeth gleamed brightly. "Now let's not waste any more time."

When the sounds of the hunters had been swallowed by the night, Ionor moved from the window and took down her hooded cloak. The dark brown wool would be almost invisible in the night, which was to her liking. An encounter with Pleddis' soldiers was something she wished to avoid—although it

was not for Pleddis to question her coming and going, nor for any man to hold her back from the path she had set foot on seven years before.

Klesst's wide eyes greeted her when she opened the door. Perhaps if her eyes had not reminded her of Kane. . . if her hair had not been red like his. . .

"You're awake," Ionor stated in automatic reproof.

"I couldn't sleep with everything happening, Mother. And I've slept so much of the day." She wanted to ask if the soldiers had captured Kane, but she dared not show interest. But Kane was magic, for he had vanished from her closet. They couldn't catch a sorcerer, could they?

"That's all right. Put your clothes on now, Klesst. We're going to go for a short walk."

"Why, Mother? Tonight's the Demonlord's Moon." She felt a thrill of bewildered fright.

"That's all right. The soldiers will protect us from any bad things. The night air will break your fever. Just get dressed now."

"I think my fever is gone now." Could soldiers protect her from the black hound?

"Just get dressed."

She wondered if Mother had a surprise for her birthday. One of the girls in the village told her how she was taken out to the stable on the night of her birthday, and there was a baby colt just born, and she got to have him because he was born on her birthday. But Mother never gave her surprises on her birthday. Sometimes Greshha did, and pretended that they were gifts from Mother too—but Klesst knew better, because once she saw Greshha embroidering the birthday skirt with her own hands.

"Did I hear one of the soldiers say that Greshha came back?"

"No, Klesst. Why are you dawdling?"

"Which skirt shall I wear, Mother?"

"It doesn't. . . Wear the dark blue one."

That was her best one. "Can I wear my good linen blouse?" Maybe it was a birthday surprise.

"Yes. Hurry, Klesst." Ionor fidgeted with her fingers, subconsciously seeking to speed her dressing, but not wanting to touch the girl. Her body felt tense as she watched Klesst hurry on her clothes, struggle to push her feet into buskins she had outgrown. She would need a new pair soon. . .

Ionor pushed the thought from her mind. It was too late to turn back; she knew that when Kane returned to Raven's Eyrie. Pleddis' appearance had made her think briefly that the Demonlord could be cheated of his bargain. Yet while this thought might have stirred a phantom of hope, far greater was her anger at the chance her vengeance would not be fulfilled. But the Demonlord would not be cheated. The game was his, and this was only another cat-and-mouse cruelty of his dark humor. She had struggled seven years to quell any love for the child, knowing the unholy bargain she had sworn to consummate. And yet, if Pleddis had taken Kane, might she have learned in time to. . .

Then surged stronger the screaming vision of seven years past—the death and horror of Kane's raid, the shame of her captivity, the tearing agony later in the ruins of her home. . .

"Mother, I'm ready now. Why is your face

so strange?" Wrapped in her woolen shawl, Klesst looked up at her anxiously.

Ionor shook her head, closed her eyes for a moment. "Nothing's wrong, Klesst. Now come along quickly."

IX. Broken Barricades

The mass of laurel roots sagged beneath his weight. Bits of rock and humus crumbled away from where the bush anchored itself to the bluff. He heard the trickling sound of its fall. With painstaking care Kane transferred his weight to another shelf of rock and inched forward against the bluff. No handholds here—just the desperate pressure of his body against the bare rock.

Mist rose from the river far below, breathing a damp film upon the slippery rocks. At times the mist completely obscured the tiny ledge Kane followed, so that he became uncertain which fragmentary path led down to the river bank, or ended instead several yards beyond in a sheer drop. Time and again he had to backtrack over some perilous section of blind trail which moments before had required all his effort to negotiate. No longer was Kane sure whether he actually followed the path to the river—or even if such a trail existed. The fog held its secrets well, and often he had to rely solely on touch to discover the next foothold.

The mist writhed through his mind as well. Kane lost note of time; it seemed he had been crawling for ages across the treacherous bluff, never coming closer to either summit or base. And in truth he was lost. The rudimentary path he struggled along wormed across the escarpment above the River Cotras for miles beyond the point where Kane had hoped to descend. This path was only a broken ledge along a series of faults in the strata—a deadly trail no mountain man would attempt even by day. Pleddis, who was scouring the gravel beds between river and cliff, never considered that his wounded quarry would be rash enough to crawl along the escarpment where no path existed. And so Kane passed beyond the line of his pursuers—although the crumbling ledge that had saved him from capture threatened at any instant to cast him headlong into the mist-wreathed darkness.

He seemed to move in a dream. The mist crawled in phantom shapes; spectral hands clawed out to tear him from the ledge. Even the cold, sweating rock seemed unreal, unsubstantial. Kane knew this was no dream, but he had to force himself to be aware of his reality. Otherwise he would lose concentration, no longer care whether a tangled clump of laurel would bear his weight or crumble beneath his boot. He ground his bleeding hands against the rock, savagely pressed down on his limping ankle—using the pain to drive back the sense of dream.

But the phantoms waxed more substantial, the lichen garbed stones less real. And no further could the agony of his body overcome the fever in his mind. Somehow Kane managed to lurch on toward where the ledge seemed to broaden—or was that too a trick of his faltering senses? Unable to determine, he sprawled heavily onto the dank shelf of rock.

His limbs were nerveless. His exhausted

body ached for air, but his chest seemed too weakened to draw breath fast enough. Kane shuddered; great spasms shook his sweat-slimed frame.

He lay like one dead, while he fought to hold consciousness. Vertigo shivered through his brain. The ledge he pressed against tilted, spun away, dissolved. . .

And then the rocks dissolved.

And the stone became transparent, clearer than the finest diamond.

And the mountains opened to Kane.

And Kane looked within the mountains.

He saw the treasures of the hills locked in their crypts of primal stone—veins of gold and silver, raw gemstones, buried crowns and chests of coins—and the grim guardians who watched over them.

He saw the graves of the hills, where forgotten skeletons mouldered into dust—and lost tombs whose corpses lay unquiet and imprisoned, and their rotted eyes burned with blue flame as they writhed to return his stare.

He saw the graveless dead of the River Cotras—who had been claimed by the river's fury, who had thrown themselves into its flood in futile search for oblivion, who had been flung into its depths to hide the fruits of murder—white scattered bones, and current-tossed skulls, and moss-crusting lairs for fishes and wriggling things.

He saw the lost mines of the ancients, and that which they mined and that which they buried—that which they sought after and did not find, and that which they feared and could not flee—and the knowledge made him close his eyes and cry out.

He saw caverns that crawled downward and downward, and the blind flapping things that dwelled within them—and the cities that were raised there, where no light would ever burn—and the misshapen faces that peered fearfully from slitted windows in towers for which there were no doors.

He saw the black flames of the far abyss, toward which monstrous worms gnawed chaotic tunnels through the rock—seeking the flames of Hell, where as obscene moths they would burst forth to wheel and dart, until their smouldering wings would fail, and they would plunge like meteors into the lake of fire.

He saw the hidden creatures of the mountains, risen from their secret dens to hunt by the Demonlord's Moon. Huge, bloated toads that hopped through the fog, flickering forth searching tongues from reeking jaws of acid-venomed fangs. Lonely abandoned cabins, inviting a traveler to shelter—that were neither cabins nor abandoned, and their invitation was not for refuge. Glowing-eyed creatures shaped somewhat like men, who ran on furred limbs, and showed wolves' fangs when they howled. Shambling giants like misshapen apes, yellow-toothed and shovel-taloned—some shaggy as bears, some scaled like snakes—bestial descendants of those who first claimed man's image. Creeping from caverns, naked creatures no longer quite human—filthy, scabrous packs of men, women and mewing children, not half so hideous as the hunger that brought them forth. And that which follows lonely travelers in the dark of woods—until at last they look behind, and in

that moment die (Kane looked upon its face, and terror scarred his soul).

There were others. . .

And Kane moaned and gnawed his tongue, crushed his fists to his eyes. Until the visions faded into grey, and only the knowledge remained.

He opened his eyes. The rock was solid about him. The fever had broken.

And now a steaming foetid breath snuffed his body. Eyes like red glowing stars stared balefully down upon his upturned face.

"No. Serberys," said a voice, "Kane is not ours. . . yet."

Kane snarled and flung himself aside. Larger and blacker than any bear of these mountains, the hound of Hell snarled back at him.

"Now we've spoiled his dream," came the sardonic laugh. "Were you dreaming, Kane?" The Demonlord's onyx-taloned hand rested on his hound's hacked neck. He stood tall and lean and muscular; his garments were black and finely cut to the current mode—full sleeved shirt and tight trousers, knee boots of soft leather, and a long sword at his belt. A wide black cloak seemed to flap about his shoulders, but Kane knew it was not a cloak.

Kane glared at the majestically evil face and the unwinking black eyes. "If you've come for me, Sathonys, you'll find my steel as ready as ever."

The Demonlord smiled—mockery robbed his expression of any warmth. "We've met on friendlier terms in past years, Kane. Why do you show your fangs now?"

"We'll play this game no longer," growled Kane, edging back along the ledge so that the face of the cliff was close behind him. Serberys' squat bulk completely blocked the trail before him; black tongue licked smoking jowls. He flexed the cramped pain from his swordarm, but did not yet draw his blade.

"But a vassal plays his lord's game for so long as the master wills," mocked Lord Tloluvín, his cloak billowing about him.

"I'm not your vassal." Kane's fists clenched like rocks.

"But you've served me well in the past." The night winds moaned along the escarpment, but his cloak did not swirl in obedience to the wind's caress.

"And you've served me better—and we've fought side by side. But Kane owes allegiance to neither god nor demon, and I'll not be your pawn in this game you play now."

"If not pawn, perhaps prize," the Demonlord laughed. "And yet, you must surely understand that all mortals are but pawns."

"Nor am I mortal."

"Perhaps before dawn you'll be proven wrong on both counts."

"This may be my last night, but who comes for me will find no pawn!" warned Kane, the fury of his blue eyes as hellish a flame as the Demonlord's own.

Lord Tloluvín studied the death in Kane's stare. "I've cause enough to respect you, Kane—true, and admire you. At times our battles have been the same cause."

"You show little gratitude for a comrade in arms."

"Kane! You know better!" protested Lord Tloluvín in sardonic reproof. "I only follow my nature—one you well understand. Sath-

onys, Tloluvin, Lato, by whatever name—my nature is the same. Only a fool expects loyalty in the Demonlord's friendship."

"Perhaps then you too are only a pawn—to your nature, or whatever laws you obey."

The Demonlord's smile was suddenly menacing. Serberys growled like brazen thunder and took half a stride forward on the ledge. "Your wit is as bold as your arrogance, Kane. We'll argue this later, I think."

"But stop to consider my game—since I doubt its nature confuses you. You must admit I've set the gameboard well. For seven years Ionor's festering hate has poisoned this wounded land—twisted her soul and tainted the spirits of those about her. And now to seal her pact of vengeance she will give me the child—the daughter she has tortured herself to keep hating for seven years. Is it not a work of art, Kane? You can admire art such as this, I know. Or do you better appreciate the mastery with which I drew you to me here tonight—held by bonds of fever like a chained sacrifice, with greed and ruthless cruelty like a snarling pack to drive you—and a trail of death and ruin to mark the passage of the hunt."

"If you've set the gameboard for this night. Sathonys," Kane spat back, "you still cannot manipulate all the pieces. Other men you may use as pawns, but not Kane! I'll yield to no predestined fate, and if I fall, I'll die a free man!"

"Still shaking your bloodstained fist at fate, Kane? But I suppose that is your nature, and I return your accusation. Before dawn comes we'll speak further on free will, and then I think we'll know better whether this arrogance is vain boast or desperate faith."

Serberys raised his sooty muzzle and bayed. The ravenous howl sent echoes of terror resounding through the night.

Lord Tloluvin stroked his massive shoulders. "Yes, Serberys, I sense it too. Ionor approaches Raven's Bald with the child, and we must go await her."

His smile was agelessly cruel. "By your leave, Kane—but while we've tarried here, the seeds sown seven years ago in hate, and so carefully nurtured since, are about to flower beneath my moon."

"And did you know that this trail you've so desperately followed ends in a sheer precipice only a short way from here?"

Thunder smashed down over the ledge, like deafening laughter.

Kane stood alone.

X. Demonlord's Moon

At first Kane hoped that the Demonlord had lied. As rage fired new strength through his muscles, he plunged recklessly along the now wider trail. For some distance the ledge offered a secure path along the face of the cliff. Kane realized now that he was not on the trail he had thought to follow, but at the same time he was headed in the direction of Raven's Bald. Lord Tloluvin had known this—had he then lied to make Kane turn back?

The Demonlord had not lied this time.

Kane skidded to a halt, as before him the ledge abruptly fell away. Here the fault in the strata had broken loose, and a great section of the escarpment had sheared off into

the River Cotras far below. No trail crossed the black chasm.

Straining to pierce the river mist, Kane peered upward. Above him the cliff marched into the night; below he could hear the muffled roar of River Cotras. From what he remembered of the river gorge in this region, this ledge must be at least a hundred feet from the crest. He was trapped here, unless. . .

Examining the chasm, he thought he discerned a narrow crack which appeared to lead to the area of the fall. If he could find handholds along this crevice, he *might* be able to reach the slide—where the broken rock *might* provide an avenue to scale the bluff.

There was, of course, no hope in turning back.

Am I truly a pawn in the Demonlord's game!

The crack in the rock ran perhaps fifty feet—a sheer plummet—before it reached the slide rubble. The stone was damp and slippery, white with frost in places. Bits of splintered rock plugged the crevice every few inches. There scarcely seemed space enough to dig his fingers.

Stretching out, Kane forced his powerful hands into the crevice. He heaved his massive body off the ledge and into space. His giant shoulders hunched and strained; his legs shuffled against the rock, while the river mist swirled up about him from far below.

His movements were rapid, for he knew his overtaxed strength would falter in another moment. Like a great ape, he swung across the escarpment, driving his body on by force of will. Death awaited his first misjudged grip.

The crevice slowly narrowed. Kane found he must support his weight solely by his clawing fingers—and still the crack tightened. Until there was no longer space to thrust his fingers.

Kane's breath grunted an inarticulate curse, but with each second a killing agony, he wasted no time. Hanging perilously by one arm, Kane quickly drew a dagger from his boot. Its flat-balanced blade was designed for throwing; whether its steel would support his bulk, Kane had only one way of determining. Using the knife as a piton, Kane jammed it into the crevice and tried his weight.

The tempered steel shivered and grated; the hilt seemed to bend slightly under the tearing stress. But it held. Clinging desperately to the sweaty hilt, Kane jerked its mate from his other boot. He thrust it into the crevice, then swung out with the other blade. Two insignificant hafts of steel and leather were all that supported him above the deadly abyss. It seemed the blades could never endure the strain. They did; Kane's desperate gamble succeeded.

With these makeshift pitons, he struggled across the final few yards to what was relative safety. Reaching the rubble left by the avalanche, he gratefully rested his boots on an outjutting boulder. An hour's rest would seem life-saving now, but he knew there was not a minute to spare. Grimly he began to scale the chaos of broken rock which marked the slide.

Stundorn was ill at ease. The blocky mer-

cenary distrusted the strange swirling mist that cloaked then revealed the autumnal ridges. Nor did he like the eerie shadows that seemed to flash along in the darkness on all sides of them—although time and again a sudden frightened challenge had revealed nothing. *But would shadows make sounds?*

Once more he tried to fight down gnawing fear. He had lost hope of finding Kane in the night—already they had hunted farther than Pleddis had been prepared. Pleddis had over-stretched their lines, spread the search too far. Now they wandered through the darkness in small bands. Stundorn glanced ahead on the ridge as the Demonlord's Moon rose high over Raven's Knob. Dread chilled his spirit. This trail skirting the river gorge was no place to linger tonight.

"Are you sure you know what you're doing?" he demanded of Nattios.

The mountaineer's nerves were, if anything, worse. "There's the tracks. Look at them yourself, and tell me what we're doing. Woman and a child, and not too far ahead. I'll kiss your ass if it's not the woman from the inn and her kid."

"But why would she be on the trail to Raven's Knob?" the other persisted. "No sane errand would take her there tonight of all nights. Hell, you know the stories they tell."

"I didn't say she was going to Raven's Knob," Nattios argued. "I said this trail leads past Raven's Knob. We don't know where she's really headed."

"Then why don't we turn back," grumbled one of the other half dozen men in their party. "Damn woman wants to take her kid and risk what's out here tonight, that's her business."

"None of that talk," growled Stundorn, thinking the man had a valid point. But no, he would have to face Pleddis, and his captain took a harsh view of cowardice.

"Ionor's out here, she's got to have a good reason," he explained. "Could be she's gone to meet Kane. That kid's got hair like Kane, and those blue eyes. Didn't get them from her mother, and we don't know who she calls father. Might be it's Kane—he's been through this range of hills before."

"Seemed ready enough to drink his blood back at the inn," the grumbler persisted.

"Could have been fake," guessed Stundorn. "Kane decided to hole up at Raven's Eyrie after all—and she was fixing them food. Could be Kane's more welcome there than anyone guessed. Might explain how he managed to slip out of the inn without our knowing it."

"Well, there's something sure funny about that inn," Nattios contributed. Talk drowned out the night's eerie sounds. He hoped the conversation would continue.

They shuffled on a bit farther in silence. The movement from the corner of their eyes seemed to increase; the night sounds edged closer at hand. Bolder.

"How close are we to Raven's Knob?" Stundorn asked, uneasily gazing at the bald spur of rock on the crest of the ridge.

"Pretty close—maybe a mile or so by trail," the tracker hazarded. "Stundorn, you suppose Kane knows you shot him?"

"That ain't certain," protested the man with the arbalest, who had earlier boasted of

it.

"Because maybe Kane's dead after all. We ain't none of us seen him since the first. There's some damn weird things you hear about Kane—and if he died tonight. . . Well, there's been dead men before that didn't lie in their graves."

"Shut up!" Stundorn cursed him, thinking that a dead man would surely take vengeance on his slayer if he could return from the grave.

"I just wondered if you knew for sure you shot him, and if you knew where the quarrel hit him, that's all. Then maybe we'd know whether Kane's just crippled, or whether up ahead somewhere there's a dead man waiting. . ."

"I said, shut up! Keep your mind on the trail."

"Ain't nothing there to keep my mind on. A blind man could read these tracks—they're leading straight along the trail to Raven's Knob."

"Vaul! What's that!" someone gasped.

They froze in their stances to listen. A scraping, scrambling sound, not far away. . .

"It's something climbing up from the river!" another cried out.

"Fool! That's a sheer drop!" Nattios swore.

"It's closer!"

"Then what. . .?"

With a bloodcurdling howl, Kane flung himself over the last shelf of rock. A man screamed in terror.

Kane's face was battered; his body and clothing torn, filthy, stained with blood. His sword flashed from scabbard as he cleared the precipice, a yell of animal ferocity twisting his lips. He had sprung out of the abyss as if by sorcery—a vengeful phantom who loomed to giant stature in the terror of that moment. The Demonlord's Moon cast its red glare upon him, and his killer's yees blazed with the sure promise of death.

Stundorn's shot was wild, for only fear had triggered his weapon. "Kane!" someone bawled in panic. The bounty hunters broke and fled.

With a roar of insane fury, Kane lunged after them. With no thought of danger, he drove them before him. Too long had he been hounded by jackals; the wounded lion had turned to kill.

Stundorn wasted an instant trying to crank the cocking ratchet of his arbalest. The reflex was fatal now, for his comrades had left him to stand alone. As he dropped the useless weapon and groped for his sword, Kane's hell-driven blade split him almost in half. The others made no attempt to stand before his rush. In frantic haste to escape the bellowing demon, Nattios misjudged the edge of the cliff; his screams were swallowed in the river mists.

Kane ravaged after them. Another mercenary died with Kane's sword sunk to the hilt through his spine. The survivors split from the trail to plunge into the forest, and Kane leapt after them to tackle the last man. Brutally he pounded the mercenary's skull against the rocks, again and again, until his fists held only pulp.

Then the red mists of rage parted, and Kane rose from his gory work. From the

black trees he heard another man scream once and break off. Under the dark pines, shadows rustled to close on the echo of death. Kane coughed and shook his head. As the killing rage left him, awareness of his danger returned.

Had Pleddis heard the cries, the fury of Kane's attack? Had someone escaped to warn him of Kane's presence? The problems seemed only of minor importance; Kane knew a far deadlier menace was closing about him. He stared defiantly at the ridge before him.

There before the red moon rose Raven's Knob. And this trail climbed toward it. Ahead was Ionor with the child—but how far ahead?

Kane paused only to snatch up and recock Stundorn's arbalest—for the steel-bowed weapon was accurate to kill at over one hundred fifty yards, and he might still get close enough. . .

Throwing his last strength into his stride, Kane pounded up the trail to Raven's Knob. His sense of hideous danger all but drowned the agony that shrieked through his frame with every step.

Klesst suddenly stopped and tugged at Ionor's cloak. "Mother, let's not walk any farther. I'm tired now."

"Come on, Klesst. It isn't much farther. If you don't stop this whining, I'll slap you."

Mother's slaps stung all the worse because the girl sensed the anger in her blow. "But Mother, I'm frightened out here. The soldiers are way behind us."

"I said, come on!" Ionor jerked her arm forward, then released her hand once Klesst started to follow. She had always tried to keep from touching her. . . It was better that way.

"Mother, I think I remember this place."

"Surely you've played near here often before."

"Never. The other children are afraid to come here, and I don't like to be alone so far in the woods."

Ionor walked resolutely on, impatiently slackening her quick stride to let the child stay beside her. It was not as if Klesst were hers. She was Kane's—and a stolen part of her own flesh. Stolen. Raped and shamed and stolen. Klesst wasn't her daughter—she had been determined on that from the first. She was a cancer which Kane had implanted within her body—and in pain she had been purged of the cancer. Almost. The child was something apart from her. If there had ever been love this would be different, but there had never been love; there never would be love. She would feel no more guilt for Klesst than for a cancer that a surgeon excised and destroyed.

It would be over in another few minutes. Seven years of hate. Klesst would not suffer. Not like she had. . .

"Mother, I think this is the place in my dream."

"Hush, Klesst."

"No, Mother! I know it's the same place. That great big rock up there is where the black dog first appears, and the black man who walks behind him." Klesst's voice rose in sharp fear.

Ionor frowned at the girl. She had hoped

to avoid physical contact—*physical force*—with the child, though she had a length of cord under her cloak if she needed it. "Don't be afraid, Klesst. When you get to that big rock and see that there's no black hound and his master—then you won't have those silly nightmares any more."

"I'm still scared," Klesst whispered, her eyes round and frightened.

"Come on, quickly now."

Klesst walked slowly on. She did not want to anger Mother. She used to think that if she never made Mother angry again, then Mother might forget the awful thing she had once done—although what this crime might have been, she never understood. Of late Klesst had lost hope of making Mother ever forget.

Then her owl-like eyes stared at the barren spur of rock. Ionor had forgotten—if she ever knew—how well Klesst could see in the dark.

"Mother!" screamed Klesst, breaking away. "I can see them! It's the black dog and the black man! They're waiting in the shadow of those big rocks up ahead! Mother! The black dog sees me too! Can't you see how red his eyes glow!"

"Come here, damn you!" shouted Ionor, reaching for the cord. In her urgent need to catch the terrified girl, she lunged and stumbled over a root. "Come here!" she yelled, as she sprawled after the retreating child.

It was the last fragment of horror for Klesst. She whirled and dashed back down the trail, utter panic lending horrible impetus to her childish stride.

Ionor called once more, then saved her breath for overtaking Klesst. The girl could not stay ahead of her for very long.

But terror gave her strength, so that Klesst flew headlong down the path, running faster than she ever had. She could hear Ionor's boots drawing closer from behind, and in her mind Mother, the black hound and its master all merged into one onrushing phantom of dread.

A giant, diseased apple tree overhung the trail. The last of a blighted orchard that had once stood along this slope, the huge tree reached over the path with grotesque and nightmarish limbs. The sick-sweet odor of rotting apples hung under its shadow like the smell of stale flowers in a graveyard. It had frightened Klesst when first they passed beneath its clutching branches.

Now as she rushed past it, her feet skidded on the rotted fruit. Klesst howled and pitched flying onto the decay strewn ground. The jar of her fall left her no breath to cry out.

Desperately she tried to scramble back up to run. Too late. A frenzy of motion in the darkness, and Ionor's cold hand knotted in her disordered hair. Still trying to draw breath, Klesst was yanked to her feet.

Ionor slapped her hard. "Now I'll show you what good it is to run!" she panted. And she drew the girl's wrists together, fumbled with the cord.

Klesst watched mutely as her hands were tied—still too terrified to grasp what was happening to her. She wondered if Mother meant to whip her like once she did Sele.

There was a scuff of boot on stone, then another silhouette joined the apple tree's

contorted shadow.

It's the black man, thought Klesst. He's come with his hound. Mother will give me to him...

"Kane!" snarled Ionor, leaping up in fury.

There was death in Kane's eyes.

The arbalest in his arms shuddered.

Ionor shrieked in clawing agony as the iron-barbed quarrel tore into her belly, flung her back against the tree. She should have fallen then; instead she hung there, writhing in torment. At pointblank range the bolt had drilled through her spine and sunk into the gnarled trunk.

She struggled frantically to break free, but her strength suddenly failed. Hate was slower to desert her, and she spat curses through her bubbling lips as she died. And finally there was an end even to her hate. Her slumped figure hung limply from the apple tree, impaled on the iron spike like a shrike's prey on a thorn.

Clumsily—for his chest pounded with agony, and scarlet mists blurred his vision—Kane gathered up his sobbing child and wrapped her in his wolfskin cloak.

"Well played, Kane!" came sardonic congratulations. "I had thought the game won."

Klesst buried her face in her father's shoulder. Kane warily shifted his burden away from swordhilt. The Demonlord and his hound stood before him on the trail.

"Do you still say *I'm* your pawn?" he growled. "There stands your pawn. Your pact is forfeit, and you'll have to play at *my* game if you think to claim this prize!"

"*Your* game, Kane?" mocked Sathonys. "I think not. And perhaps I was wrong to call you a pawn. We'll play the game another day, and then we'll see whether Kane is truly master of his fate, or simply fool of luck."

"Still, I won't say this outcome displeases me. Our souls are like matched blades fired in the same forge, Kane. After all these centuries, I believe I'd *miss* you—and you've served me well so many times."

Kane's eyes blazed in anger.

"As an ally, of course," the Demonlord amended, with a sarcastic salute.

He touched the hound's misshapen head. "Come, Serberys. The moon is growing old, and our friend Kane has led so many souls into our domain tonight. We must not delay our hunt any longer—as I see my creatures have become quite hungry."

Serberys opened his slaving jaws in a baying note of horror.

Hound and master vanished into the night.

Kane almost found pity for those who had dared to pursue him beneath the Demonlord's Moon. But pity was too rare in Kane to bestow upon his enemies.

Through the throbbing haze of pain, Weed felt himself lowered to the floor. He waited blindly for the torture to take some new direction, only thankful that the agony of his wrenched shoulders had let up. Then a knife sheared through his bonds.

He opened his swollen eyes. It was Kane, although it took a moment to be sure. The outlaw leader was a grisly sight to see this side of Hell.

Kane pushed a bottle of brandy into his mouth. Weed tried to take it in his hands, found them too numb to respond. The



brandy was fire on his torn lips and broken teeth, but he swallowed greedily as Kane tipped the flask.

In a moment he had come to himself enough to note the torn bodies of his guards strewn about the room. Kane had descended on them in a murderous rush of fury, but Weed had hung unconscious through it all.

"Can you ride?" Kane demanded.

Weed glanced at Kane's face, the quickly looked away. "I guess so," he grunted, feeling cracked ribs as he struggled to stand. "I guess so. Give me a minute to get my breath."

"There's horses saddled and ready in the stable," Kane told him. "The guards won't bother you."

"Thoem! What's happened!" muttered Weed, swaying for balance. "Where's Pleddis and all his men? They all went out to look for you..."

A chilling howl stirred the night winds. It sounded like the bay of a hound as he closes on his quarry. It was not pleasant to hear.

"I think they found other hunters already out there," said Kane.

He thrust a bulging srip into Weed's hands. It was heavy, but the weight of gold was one that Weed's tingling fingers found strength to close upon. "Here's gold," Kane told him. "Use it as you need it. When you're strong enough to ride, take Klesst here and go. Dawn will soon break, and you'll be safe enough—besides, Sathonys owes me for a game. Take Klesst with you to Obray's Station—that's well north of the Combine's authority, and no one will follow. Take good care of the girl, and when I join you shortly, I'll share my cache with you. I know that interests you."

Weed wiped the blood from his face—not realizing until later that Kane had known his designs. "Sure, Kane. Whatever you say. But what about you? Pleddis is going to return any minute now..."

"I'll see to my end," Kane grimly vowed.

Dawn was greying the skies, the Demonlord's Moon had plunged beneath the black ridges, when Pleddis pushed open the door of Raven's Eyrie. He staggered into the common room—his garments ragged and bloody, his face more colorless than ever. His limbs trembled, and there was gore on his sword no human veins had spilled. He had lost his laugh.

"Demons!" he blurted out with a choked voice. In a dazed stupor, he lurched across the center of the room. "Devils from the hills! Vaul! The things were everywhere! Snapping, clawing—leaping out on you from the trees and the shadows and the rocks! Too many—reaching out from all around us! Couldn't make a stand!"

His eyes still shone with horror. "And that hound! That hideous black hound! I saw it drag Eriall down as he ran! Vaul! I can still hear its baying! Drove me like a hunted fox across the ridges—but I outran it, made it back alive!"

He paused for breath, and awareness of his surroundings came to him. The huge inn lay in total silence.

"Where... Where is everybody?" Pleddis called out.

"I'm right here," said Kane, rising out of the shadow. □



daughter of evil

by ROBERT E. HOWARD

Illustrated by Frank Frazetta

*They cast her out of the court of the king,
Into the night and the dust,
For even to lustful kings there comes
An end to a maddening lust.*

*Naked she lay in the filthy dust,
Under the star-dimmed skies,
And the serving wenches trod her down
And spat between her thighs.*

*They pressed their buttocks to her lips
In the lust of their wanton play;
The mute black slaves stole out of the courts
And raped her where she lay.*

*Gaunt midnight changed the haunted skies;
Her limbs flexed on the ground;
The ragged beggars slunk from their lairs
And snarled like wolves around.*

*Her lovers were thieves with faces scarred,
Her couch was dung and dust,
And she drowned the beggars one by one
In the deeps of her chartless lust.*

*There came a man in the dark of dawn,
As a wolf that scatters curs,
And the filth she wallowed in could not hide
The beauty that was hers.
"Mylitta, goddess of whoredom, thanks!"
He quoth with eyes ablaze,
"I have found her at last for whom I have
sought
"For a day and a million days!*

*"Weak are the women in whose white arms
"I have mocked with evil mirth,
"But here is the wench that was made for me
"In the dawn light of the earth!*

*"Mine are the lusts of hoofs and horns,
"Of the he-goat and the loon,
"And the naked witches that demons
deflower
"On the dark side of the moon.*

*"No common sin may fire my eyes,
"Glutted with excesses fell—
"My lust is stained with the dung that stirs
"On the stinking streets of Hell.*

*"Daughter of Evil, on Evil's knees
"Your lustful breech first sat—
"Come—we will build a tower of sin
"For men to marvel at."*





If you were to travel through the bustling cities of Ireland, you would undoubtedly find yourself confronted with delicately rendered posters of art nouveauish women puffing on cigarettes or advertisements for various events that somehow brought the works of Mucha to mind. Things seem a bit brighter because of such works and the viewer must assuredly wonder who was responsible for bringing a spark of electricity to such mundane subject matter.

The answer would be Jim Fitzpatrick. An advertising artist, a designer of rock album jackets, a book illustrator, and a painter of murals, Fitzpatrick has justifiably been de-

scribed as Ireland's most exciting young artist and recently he has achieved world-wide recognition for his posters of Celtic mythology and related themes. Jim's work has been compared favorably by critics to that of Beardsley and Mucha, though his influences range from early American comic books to the stunning stained-glass artistry of Harry Clarke. The producer of numerous one-man-shows at local art institutes, Mr. Fitzpatrick's illustrations and paintings have struck a chord of emotion in virtually all who have seen them and examples of his style hang in the National Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

A resident of Dublin, Jim has plans of packing up the family and moving to New York later in the year—yet, we can all rest assured that he won't leave his Irish heritage behind, but will use it to make his mark on the American commercial art field. None who have seen his work can doubt his success.

The following folio is comprised of selected scenes from Celtic mythology and history; Jim has provided special notes to serve as a bit of interesting background to his illustrations, and to aid us in catching an all-too-brief glimpse of a world we've always been told about, but have never really been shown.

Plate 1: Tristian and Iseult. Tristian was sent to Ireland by King Mark of Cornwall to seek a suitable bride for him and so consolidate the alliance between the Celts of Cornwall and Ireland. According to the legend, Tristian killed a dragon that was ravaging the island and in return was given the princess Iseult for the king. Unfortunately for King Mark, the couple fell in love, were banished from court, and their story ended tragically in death.

Plate 2: Deirdre of the Sorrows. Deirdre was a woman of incomparable beauty loved by King Conchobhar of Ulster. She eloped with Naoise Son of Visneach and his brothers Ardan and Ainnie, and was pursued relentlessly by the King across Ulster. They finally fled to Scotland and safety, but were lured back later, with promise of pardon, to Ireland. The great Scots hero and soldier of fortune Fergus Mac Riach went as surety for their safe conduct, but despite this Naoise and his brothers were treacherously slain.

Mac Riach, enraged at this betrayal, sacked the royal palace and left the services of Conchobhar for Connacht and the court of Queen Maeve.

It was a year later that Conchobhar, tired of Deirdre's obvious hatred for him, decided to punish her and gave her to Eoghan, the killer of Naoise. But Deirdre, rather than submit herself to this final betrayal, killed herself. The men of Ulster buried her beside Naoise Son of Visneach, and mourned them long after.

Plate 3: Nuada of the Silver Arm. On their arrival in Ireland the mystical Tuatha De Danann engaged in negotiations with the Firbolg for the kingship of the country, and when this ploy proved unsuccessful they fought and defeated them in the first battle of Magh Tuiredh. Their leader at this time, Nuada, lost his arm in this battle and, as a king had to be without physical blemish, he was obliged to step down in favor of Bres.

Bres was an oppressive ruler and the country fell into thrall to the kings of Fomhaire, an African race who occupied the West of Ireland.

Meanwhile, Nuada, his arm struck off, was seven years under cure with Dian Cecht the healer. During this time, the healing was completed and a silver arm, richly decorated with sacred runes, and with movement in every finger, was fitted to him. From that time on he was known as Nuada Airgedlamh or Nuada of the Silver Arm, and was reinstated in the sovereignty.

In his keeping was Cliamh Solais, "The Sword of Fire," which unsheathed was so powerful that no enemy could stand before it. He died in the second battle of Magh Tuiredh.

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CRISTIAN 7 1961

CRISTIAN 7 1961



DEIRDRE of the SORROWS

W. G. R. 1905



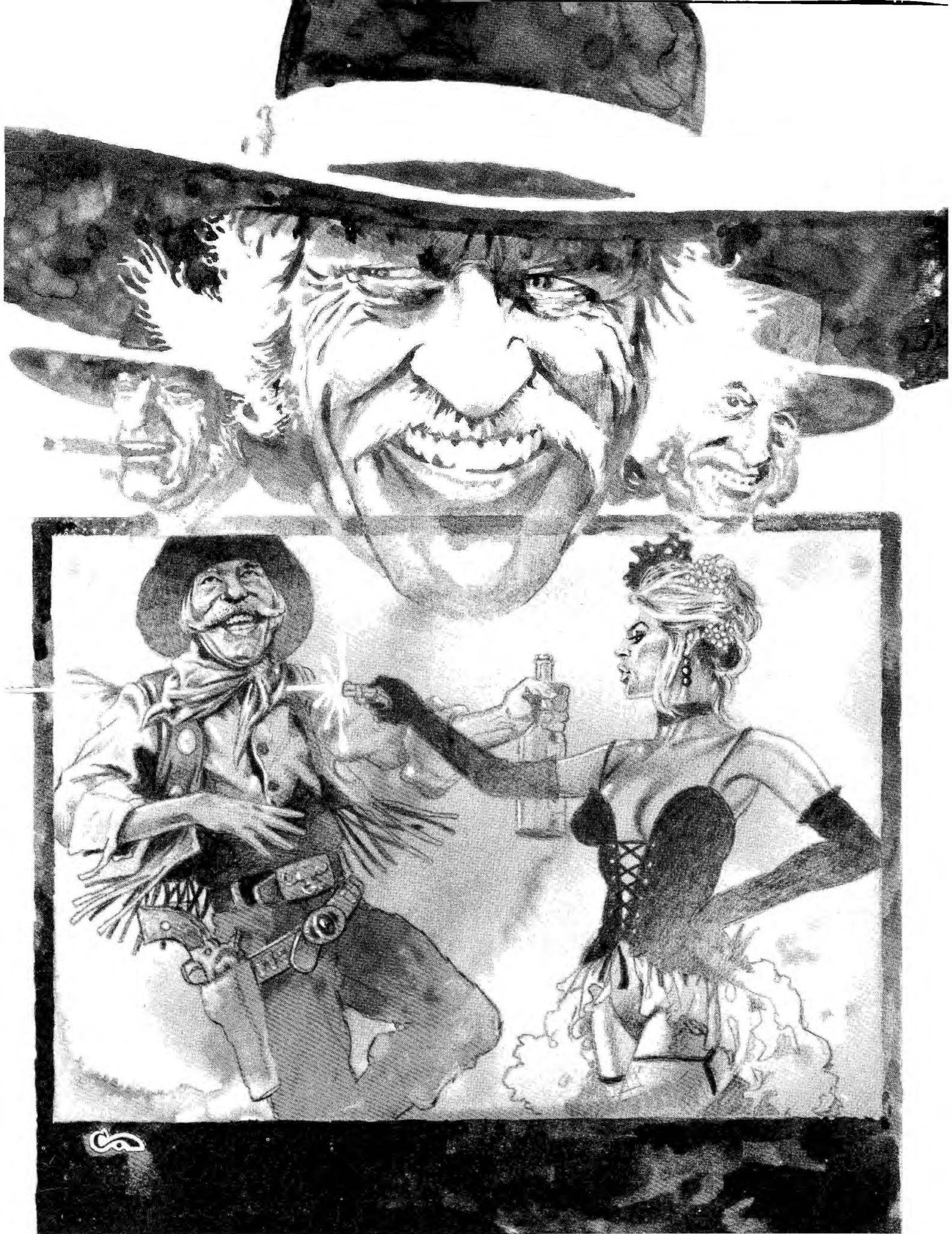
NUADA

OF THE SILVER ARM

NUADA AIRGEOLÁMh

JING THE PARK '75

NUADA of the SILVER ARM



Last Chance For Angina Pectoris At Miss Sadie's Saloon, Dry Gulch

by PAT CADIGAN

Illustrated by Clyde Caldwell



Chere's no other place I'd rather die in, the old dude kept saying, so I did him a favor and dispatched him myself, right at his table. Cheers of approval made the rounds as I replaced my pearl-handled derringer in my stockingtop and went to the bar for a drink.

My hat's off to Miss Sadie, everyone was saying. Miss Sadie is a lady. For sure.

I pounded the bar with a fist to hurry my drink along. The present barkeep was another old dude working off a debt. He was looking a bit more cyanotic than usual and if it got any worse, I'd have to dispatch him, too, and take the loss on the chin. I've told them over and over, This is a Saloon, not a rest home for old dudes. It got to be a house maxim and one of my girls did it up in needlepoint. I had it hanging over the bar to remind them, right over the Old Overcoat display. Old Overcoat is my drink. I like it neat.

The barkeep finally put my drink in front of me. I downed it in a throw, to more applause. Some days you just can't do any wrong. The piano-player swiveled around on his stool and said, How about a song, Miss Sadie?

The rest of the men took up the chant. A song, Miss Sadie, a song. I was about to hop up on one of the tables and deliver an old favorite when I happened to glance at the wall-clock and remembered that a half-hour before, Miss Jill had taken one of the men

upstairs and their time was now up.

Sorry, dudes, I said. Right now I have some business to take care of. The song will have to wait.

Aww, they all said, sadly.

I signalled the piano-player to start up a lively rag, so no one would have time to be really disappointed. The rest of the girls who weren't upstairs moved out onto the floor to catch partners. They were all dancing happily as I headed upstairs.

Miss Jill and her dude were in number four. I put my ear to the door to listen. Time up or not, it's pretty gauche to walk in on an old dude at one of his finer hours. There weren't any sounds, though, so I rapped.

Come in, Miss Sadie, said Miss Jill.

She was sitting at her vanity, reapplying her make-up and checking the result from time to time in each of the three mirrors. The old dude was still in bed, under the covers. He was humming along with the music from downstairs and tapping his fingers on the headboard.

It's twelve-thirty, Mr. Berkampt, I said. Miss Jill could be of help downstairs.

I'd like another half-hour, please, he said.

Oh, well, then, that's another twenty dollars.

I know. Put it on my tab. Dosie-do.

Miss Jill, I asked, is that all right with you?

You have to treat your girls with respect, and that means never making a decision like that for them. Otherwise, they get unhappy and leave and girls are scarce enough as it is for this kind of work.

It's fine with me, Miss Sadie, she said. I like Mr. Berkampt.

That's nice, said the man on the bed. That's exactly what I like about this place. The girls here like you. Dosie-do.

All right, I said. Till one o'clock. Have fun.

We will, said the old dude. Dosie-do. No, no, Miss Jill, he said to her as she started to get up from her dressing table. Finish with the make-up. You look so pretty. Another thing I like about this place, so pretty you all are.

I closed the door on them and went back downstairs. It's nice when a rapport develops between two people and I never discouraged it. After the old dude checks out, as it were, it's easily curable after a few treatments on the girl and hell, the old dude died happier than he'd been since before he came to my establishment. I've sent a couple of girls for cures and never regretted it. I pride myself on the fact that I have sensitive human beings in my employ.

At the bottom of the stairs, I grabbed the first old dude I met and swung him into a dance. All of my girls can dance, but *nobody* dances like I do. I can dance plain or fancy. Most of them prefer fancy, as though they

were still hot-shots and with some of them, the old energy comes back for awhile. Usually just before checkout time. This old dude I was dancing with was probably having just such a burst, he was practically bouncing off the walls.

The dance ended before I lost any important wind, so I climbed up onto a table top, letting the old dude help me with a great big smile splitting his wrinkles. In return, I winked at him and gave him a kiss on top of his bald head.

Well, dudes, I said, how about that song now? Still want to hear it?

Sure would, Miss Sadie! they all yelled.

All right! I yelled back. Miss Mary, grab your guitar. I want you to accompany me, along with the piano.

Miss Mary was the girl who had done the needlepoint. She was good with her fingers and I was thinking of giving her a raise. I don't ask questions about the girls' backgrounds when they come here—there's an office in Clearance for that—but rumor had it she was from a good family and had a good education. For my money, that's a good kind of girl to have. However, I couldn't run this place without my Miss Alexis, either, and she was totally illiterate.

Miss Mary had gotten her guitar and was sitting in a chair at my feet.

Ready, Miss Sadie, she said in her strong, clear voice. She's a natural harmonizer, another reason I wanted her to accompany me.

I launched into *Charlotte the Harlot*, Miss Mary joining in the choruses. We got the usual rousing ovation. I'm a good singer; once I even considered making a living at it, but show business is no kind of a life. Just ask anyone. This job paid a lot better in terms of security, but that wasn't on my mind as I did *The Sexual Life of the Camel* for an encore. After that, we had another round of dancing and I was back with the old dude I'd been with. He sure could hit the beats.

About ten minutes to one, Miss Jill came running down the stairs, dressed only in her fancy pants, corset and peignoir. Everyone stared at her in surprise.

Miss Sadie! Her voice was shrill in panic. Miss Sadie!

Now even the piano-player stopped playing to look at her. I motioned him to start up again.

You dudes just keep on dancing with the girls, I said in my command voice, which has yet to be disobeyed. Your nose is your own business. I made a mental note to have Miss Mary do that up in needlepoint, too, if she had the time. I liked the sound of it, even if it didn't make all that much sense.

All right, Miss Jill, I said, taking her arm and leading her back upstairs. Just what are you doing running downstairs in your Sunday Best? You know you're supposed to wear a dress during the week.

She looked down at her red corset apologetically.

I'm sorry, Miss Sadie. It's Mr. Berkampt.

I knew right away what the problem was.

Well, now, I said, leading the way down the hall to her room, let's just have us a look here.

The man was spread-eagle on the bed with his eyes closed. He wasn't smiling, but some-

thing in his face suggested he hadn't had too hard a time checking out. I felt a rush of good will for him. I like a man who dies neat, like a good drink. To make sure, I felt for his pulse and had Miss Jill get me the stethoscope I kept in the top drawer of every girl's dresser. I like to be certain, though when you've been working in a Saloon as long as I have, you get so you can tell at a glance.

I plugged into the stethoscope and listened, but there was nothing to hear. Not even a last sigh.

Is he—gone? asked Miss Jill.

I chuckled to myself as I folded the stethoscope and put it back. The melodrama can run hot and heavy with a girl as young as Miss Jill.

He sure as hell is, I said, heartily. You get dressed and I'll send Bargan for the coroner.

Do I have to dress with *him* in here? She gave the body on the bed a look that was somewhere in the neighborhood of disgust and revulsion.

Suddenly you don't like him any more? I said. You want him to leave the room just because he's dead?

She looked like she was going to really bust out and totally ruin what was left of her make-up, so I softened up a little. She was young, I remembered. This was the first time a dude had checked out while he was with her. But she was getting more and more popular, what with her blonde hair—which she never had to lighten—and her delightful complexion. Her body was just fine, too; small on top, but then most dudes are over those kinds of fixations by the time they hit my place. Not all of them, though; some of them save up strange kinds of neuroses to fiddle with in their old age. Anyway, Miss Jill was a beauty and deserved a little special treatment, just this once.

O. K., Miss Jill, I said. You go on down to Miss Beverly's and borrow one of her summer frocks.

I can't, she said, drying her eyes. She's in there with that so-called Southern gentleman, for the whole day.

Then go to Miss Rita's. She's about your size; use pins or brooches if you have to.

Thank you, Miss Sadie, she said. She was actually smiling again as she left. That girl was definitely a survivor, I decided, and began to think about giving her a specialty. Then I recollected myself and used the room phone to tell Bargan the clean-up boy to go for the coroner. Both Bargan and the piano-player were young dudes. They had to be, because their jobs were too important for me to risk having one of them check out in the middle of a critical situation. No old dudes working out debts in those jobs. But they both had all the benefits the old dudes had along with their wages; no one can say I don't treat the hired help right.

I went downstairs to tell Miss Rita about Miss Jill borrowing her dress. A fight could result from something like that and I wanted to avoid all possible friction right now. The old dude I had dispatched earlier was still slumped at his table. I'd clean forgotten him. The dancers were being careful not to knock him out of his chair. I reminded myself to get Bargan to cart him out back when he returned. I'd have done it myself, but the dude

had loaded himself up with a gunbelt, two six-shooters, and a pair of woolly chaps, and I sure couldn't handle all that dead weight. I have the high sign to the piano-player to play on without stopping, to keep the men from knowing that the coroner was coming, or, if they knew anyway, to keep them from caring too much. To kill some time, I found my old dude and danced a few.

In the middle of one of my favorites, *Muskogee Polka*, Bargan tapped me on the shoulder.

This is a helluva time to cut in, Bargan, I said. What about those things I told you to do?

Miss Sadie, *he's* outside.

The way Bargan said *he* let me know things had not gone as they should have.

Excuse me, I said to my partner, who went on dancing by himself after bowing gallantly. Bargan and I stepped out of the dancing area.

You mean the coroner? I asked.

Yes, Miss Sadie. He's out in front.

Well, that really riled me. He knew he wasn't supposed to come around in front; he was just supposed to go to the back and handle things with Bargan—not bother me. The living are my concerns, not the dead.

What's he waiting for? Why doesn't he drive around the back and—

He says he wants to talk to you. He's got somebody with him. A stranger. I never seen him before.

Did he say who this stranger was?

No, Miss Sadie, he's just standing out there. He looks like he's got a stomach ache.

Is he young or old?

Young, ma'am. About my age. Bargan rubbed his upper lip and looked uncomfortable. I don't think he's going to go away until he talks to you.

Board of Health, I thought, come to see that we aren't knee-deep in stiffs. Would be nice if they'd learn the courtesy of coming at night.

I'll look him over, I said. Meanwhile, take that dead dude at the table out back, before someone knocks him over.

Outside, it smelled like rain—just what we needed. Someday, reliable climate control would come to this crazy little planet and then Dry Gulch would really be dry, but today it would probably rain, on top of everything else. There's nothing like rain to depress a bunch of old dudes that we work our asses off trying to keep happy till check-out time.

The coroner's big, black air-car looked grossly out of place in the middle of a street made up to look like something out of a period a certain region on Earth called The Old West. Really didn't fit in. A couple of tumbleweeds blew over it and left it behind, kind of like they were as disgusted with it as I was.

In the future, I said, stepping off the wooden sidewalk, you park that thing around back like you know you're supposed to. It gives me that heebie-jeebies just to look at it and it spoils the atmosphere, you know what I mean? The old dudes look out here and see this, it'll spoil the whole afternoon for them.

The coroner came around from the other side of the car where he'd been standing with the other man. He had a folded yellow paper in his hand.

Miss Sadie, he said, I was on my way over here when your man called.

I hope you're prepared to handle two—one by derringer, one by natural causes.

One by—derringer? spoke up the young man.

Derringer, I said. I shot him. He couldn't seem to make it on his own, so I helped him. He was a good old dude, with no delinquent bills, so I did him a favor. You from the Board of Health? I've got a few choice words for you, too.

No, he said. I'm not from the Board of Health. I've come to see my father.

Doesn't he know about visiting days? I asked the coroner. They aren't even held here and they're not for another week. I don't know how you expect me to run a good business. You park that thing right out in front where anybody can see it, you trot relatives over here whenever the spirit moves you, the goddam Board of Health likes to inspect in the daytime—

Miss Sadie, said the coroner with an apology on his long horse-face that made me think of Miss Jill, this man, and his father, are both very important people in the galaxy.

This is a fair-and-square Saloon, I said. I don't know from important.

He offered me the yellow paper.

He's got a special permit from the government, Miss Sadie.

Let me see that, I said, snatching it from him and unfolding it. I scanned it quickly—speedreading's another of my fortes—saw that it was legal, and handed it back.

Fine, I said. Next time, goldernya, let me know in advance.

The gentleman didn't want to wait, said the coroner.

Oh, yeah? I said, and gave the dude my delinquent payment stare. It's a real scorcher, guaranteed to burn a hole in the pocket of the stingiest dude. He didn't even flinch under it. For a young guy, he was tough.

I'd like to see my father now, he said, quiet-voiced.

All right, come on in. You stay out here, I told the coroner. Nobody wants to see *you*.

Inside, the piano-player was banging out *Cape Cod Girls* and the energy was so high, some of the old dudes without girls were dancing with each other. I really hated to stop things, but the sooner I got the kid in and out again, the better the day would go. I pulled out my derringer and shot at the ceiling. A little plaster floated down in the ensuing silence.

Attention, dudes, I said. Got a visitor here on special permit, to see his daddy. Will the guilty party step forward?

There was some snickering, but nobody came up to claim the kid.

What did you say your name was? I asked the young dude.

Berkampt, he said. I didn't say, but my name is David Berkampt.

Oh, I said. Well, your daddy's upstairs. Matter of fact, I was just with him.

The young dude's face went a little pink, but he followed me to the stairs. I paused before going up to announce a lunch break before the afternoon party, figuring if they were busy eating, they'd be too busy to notice anything else. Old dudes enjoy eating,



and we stock everything they couldn't normally have before they came here.

I paused at Miss Jill's room and knocked, just in case she had come back to get something. That was unlikely under the circumstances, but I don't take chances with common courtesy. There was no answer, so I let us in.

On the bed there, I told the young dude. Happy and peaceful at last.

Oh, said the young dude in a whisper. If you don't mind, I won't wake him up just yet. He looks like he needs his rest.

You can't wake him, I said, unable to conceal my scorn. He's dead, you damfool.

The young dude went grey and looked like he wanted to check out himself.

You didn't—you didn't—kill—he choked and couldn't say anything more.

Natural causes, I said. The derringer case is downstairs. You pay extra to get shot in bed. Though why you should care, I added silently, nobody knows.

Slowly, the kid moved over to the bed and, to my supreme disgust, took one of the old dude's hands. I can't understand wanting to hold hands with dead people when plenty of live ones would appreciate it a lot more.

When? he asked.

Well, let's see. I looked at the clock on Miss Jill's vanity. About a half-hour ago, give or take five minutes.

His heart, he said. He'd been experiencing angina pectoris the last time I saw him.

Then that must have been what it was, I said. Just what he wanted, with a big bang and nary a whimper.

That's one of my favorite jokes, but it was kind of lost on the young dude. He didn't even crack a grin.

Miss Sadie, said a woman's voice behind me and I remembered, a bit belatedly, that I hadn't closed the door. It was Miss Beverly with her so-called Southern gentleman.

I don't think anyone, including the old dude himself, knew anything about being Southern. It seemed to involve talking funny and a complex the dude called white guilt. He said he was working it out with Miss Beverly and several of the other black girls. Exactly how the whole silly thing worked was beyond any of us, but didn't I say some of them fiddled with some strange neuroses? When you're an old dude, you get to flaunt them, particularly if you have money. That so-called Southern gentleman was loaded.

Closing the door behind me, I joined them in the hall.

What do you want?

The Major wants to know if we can have lunch sent up, said Miss Beverly.

I stared at him. So he was calling himself the Major now? He must have been having a good day.

Whatever you want, I said.

What's going on in there? Miss Beverly asked.

Old dude checked out in his own way. Nothing special.

Wal, wal, good fer him, drawled the so-called Southern gentleman in that funny voice he'd developed. I glared at him. Sometimes that could get on your nerves, that voice. He was dressed only in socks and shorts, showing off every hair he had, all one

hundred of them, with his arm tight around Miss Beverly. The feathers from her green dressing-gown waved against him like little live things. I shook my head. The strain of the day. White guilt, dead bodies, the coroner—when those things get to me, I know I'm due for two weeks' leave.

Go on, enjoy the day, I said. Call down to the kitchen for anything you want.

I went back into the bedroom.

Arrangements for disposal of the body—I shut up, not exactly by choice. They say nothing's bizarre, *they* never saw what *I* saw. The young dude had taken the stiff in his arms and was sitting on the bed, rocking it and murmuring something.

Well, of all the perverted—! I slammed the door so no one else would see. You put that down! What the hell do you think you're doing?

I was across the room in two strides and gave the young dude a yank by the collar. He fell of the bed and the old dude's body fell on top of him.

Now look what you made me do! I yelled, then lowered my voice, not wanting to bring everyone upstairs to witness the whole shameful thing. My anger gave me the strength to heave the corpse back onto the bed. I couldn't help feeling bad for the old dude. He'd died so well and within an hour of his death, the whole effect was ruined. Some days, there's just no justice.

You tell me what's the meaning of this, you young whippersnapper, or I'll have someone bounce your ass around the block! I grabbed a fistful of his brown hair and yanked.

He didn't respond to this at all. Instead, he sat on the floor and bawled openly.

Father, he sobbed. My father is dead.

Of *course* he's dead. That's what he came here for, or weren't you aware of that? (It was a miracle, now that I look back on it, that I didn't punch his lights out then and there and send him back to the coroner as a stiff.)

I came to take him out of here, he said, wiping his eyes. That gesture made me think of Miss Jill again, and I realized that he wasn't any older than she was. At that, he might have been younger.

His company, the young dude went on, Berkampt Asteroidal Mining and Manufacturing, they wanted him back, they were going to pay for a new heart—

For Chrissakes, dude, I said, look at his chest! He's already had *three* new hearts—the number's tattooed there, right under his left nipple. This was one old dude who didn't want a new heart, free or not! *He* knew he'd overstayed his welcome, even if *you* didn't. So he came here and we gave him a rousing send-off. Most old dudes put their money into places like Dry Gulch, not into second and third hearts, because they want to go with a little dignity and a lot of fun.

Of course, you can read this in any of our seven brochures on going to hell in style (so we think of it here), but he didn't know that.

He looked up at me from where he was sitting on the floor.

So you are the ferry-master, he said. Charon.

Miss Charon, I said, if the name were

Charon, but it's not. It's *Miss Sadie*.

Death is nothing for you; just an opportunity to collect your fee for taking them across.

He got up and I didn't care for the look on his face. I put my hand on my derringer without seeming to. Maybe he'd leave here a stiff, too, and it would be his own fault.

Except you don't just take them across. You force them across, he said, angrily. You're not a human being, you're a ghoul!

Well, I know when a dude's about to hit someone; it's happened once or twice that an old dude in delirium has suddenly gone berserk before we can dispatch him. I gave the young dude as good as he deserved. While he rolled around on the floor hollering and clutching himself, I arranged the old dude's body more suitably on the bed. There'd be no covering up the fact that something decidedly peculiar was going on up here, thanks to his shouting, but I'd have him off the premises as soon as he could stand up.

After awhile, he stopped rolling around and his yells became moans. I sat on the bed and looked down at him and damned if he didn't look right back through his tears. Big crier, that dude. Too bad he never knew when to do it.

They'll come for you some day, he said. They'll take you out to some kind of crazy place like this and do their best to kill you and celebrate when you go.

Dude, I said, I sincerely hope so. You trot back to this hot-shit company and tell them your daddy took his chance when he saw it and he had a terrific time of it. Now get out.

Even though I was under control, I don't think I've been that mad since I found out my last barkeep was lining his pockets with the debt he was supposed to be working off. The young dude got up and went for the door.

Go down to the end of the hall to where says Service Stairs and take those out to the back. Don't go through my Saloon in your condition or I'll have to kill you for making my clientele miserable. That's a capital offense—read the fine print in your legal permit.

He was still a little bent over and I wasn't sure if he'd understood me or if his hysteria had taken over completely. I went to the door as he left and watched him head for the Service Stairs. Well, at least *something* was going to work out; I was painfully aware of the big silence from downstairs. Sure enough, I found some of them waiting at the bottom of the staircase for an explanation or a glimpse of something. The others were staring out the front door at the hearse. I got infuriated all over again; the coroner hadn't gone around the back like I'd wanted him to. Some days, everybody's a stupid bastard.

Hey, everyone! I hollered, hoping I didn't sound too unconvincing in the rowdiness I was forcing. It's time to dance again. Plenty of time to rest later! Let's really jump!

Obediently, the piano-player started playing our theme song, *Silver Dollar Bag of Dry Gulch*, but he kept hitting wrong notes and everyone was slow to start dancing, even the girls. I went outside to the coroner.

You get this crate around the back, I snarled. The snotnose you brought with you

is waiting with two corpses that should have been taken care of already. Don't you ever come back here unless I call you first and don't you ever park in front where everyone can see you.

The coroner's long face puckered up thoughtfully.

Did you know, Miss Sadie, he said, that they're trying to outlaw you? Have you abolished?

They try it every year, I said. I'm unimpressed.

This year, they might do it, back on Earth. They say you're demeaning with your behavior and your girls. *Your* days could be numbered, Miss Sadie, in a very different way.

Tell me that, I said, the morning your hands are shaking so much that you can hardly get into your clothes, when you're too unsure of your own control to be out of sight of a bathroom. When you seem to shrink even when you're standing as straight as you can and young people look at you and pity you. Tell me that when the ol' memory goes and you wake up confused and alone in the middle of the night and I'm the only one to come hold you and talk to you. See me *then*, and tell me I'm demeaning.

Most of those men aren't that bad off, he said.

They go too fast, usually. But at least half of them wear rubber pants. All of them lose their memories once in awhile. And what do *you* care about them when they're alive?

They could be made over, said the coroner. Repaired.

And where would that leave *you*, I said. Oh, lots of them do that. Then they get tired and come here for a rousing send-off. They cheer when I check one of them out, or when someone makes it on his own. Then you come, with your big modern hearse and all those reminders of what they left behind. I'm going to put in a requisition for a Boot Hill and to hell with you. You want my business, sell the hearse and get a horse!

I groped for my derringer. He hopped into the air-car and took it over the top of my three-story wooden building. Just before I went back inside, I felt a drop of rain on my forehead.

Son of a bitch, I thought. We're going to be knocking ourselves out showing them a good time with this rain added to everything else. For an old dude, rain is just one step from tears. This was the third rain in as many weeks. I'd have to get Bargan to call Climate Control and get something done. I pay taxes, I've got the right to the full treatment for my business whenever I needed it. Abolish me? The thought was more than ludicrous. I invented this business, but it would outlive me. It *had* to; I had my checking-out place all picked out for my own send-off and I didn't want to miss out.

Inside, the piano-player's music was getting stronger. Maybe it wasn't going to be such a bad afternoon in spite of everything. I found the spry old dude I'd been dancing with earlier and we did the fastest, fanciest dancing Dry Gulch had seen in quite some time. He kept right up with me, too, no trouble at all. For awhile. In the middle of our fourth dance, however, when I threw my dress up over my head, he had a stroke. □



*She sits all day on an ebon couch
Where golden ruby-eyed leopards crouch.*

*Great black cobras, all the day,
In even measured cadence sway,
And close at her ivory shoulder stay.*

*And ever beside her, in her place,
Stands a maid with a panther's face,*

*Holding a goblet brimming full
Of wine of a curious ebon shade.
And all the day on a golden skull
Bast taps with her fingernails of jade,*

Making a music bitter and keen,

*And her eyes burn with a brooding sheen—
And the cobras dance before their queen.*

*But night comes black, and the stars arise,
And the desert wind through the window
sighs;*

*And Bast lets fall the silver sand
In a burning stream from her ivory hand,
And pale ghosts come from Shadowland.*

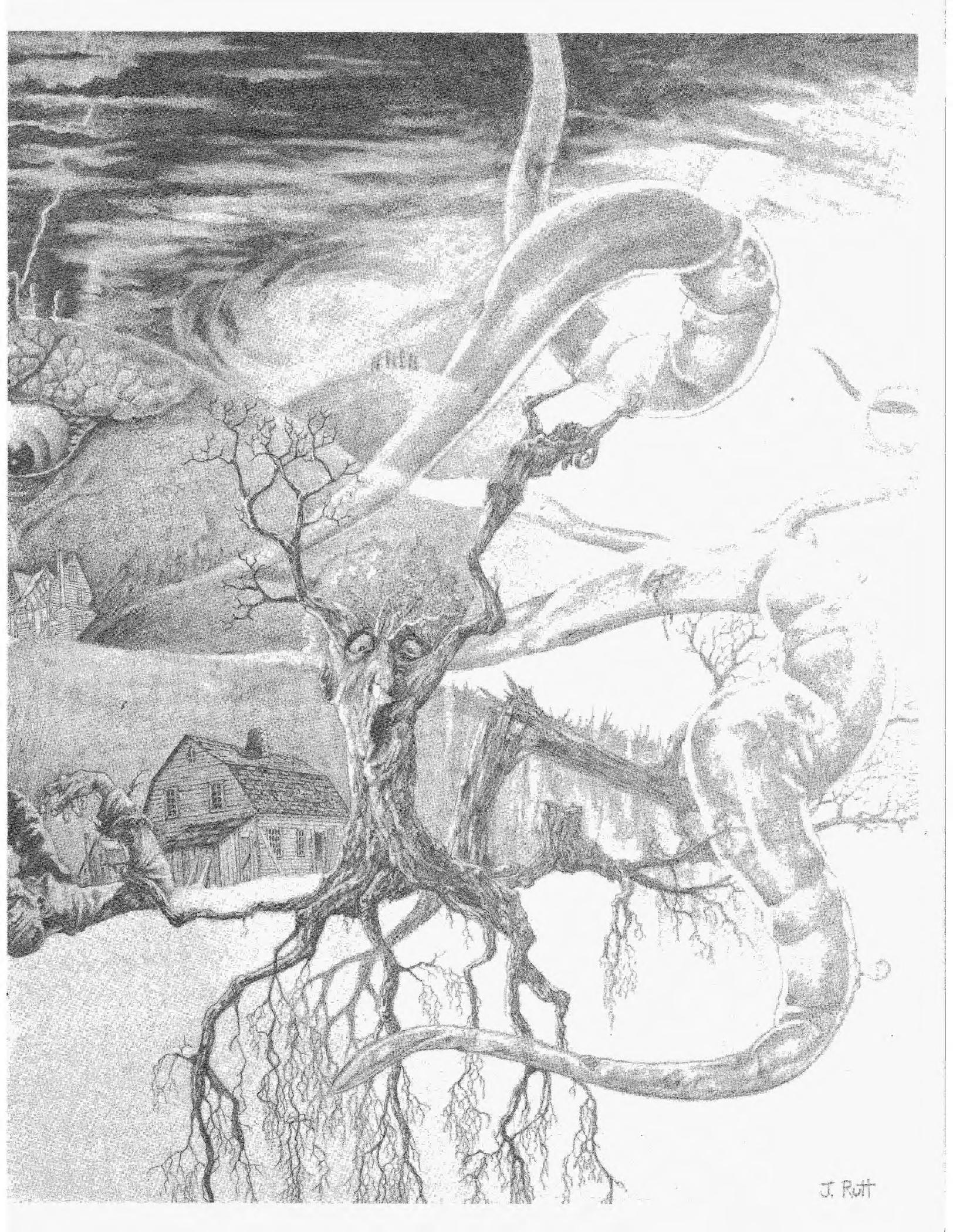
*The stars gleam on the sands below,
And the curtains waver to and fro;
And Bast revels with pallid shades
Who lived and loved her long ago.*

Robert E. Howard

palace of bast

Illustrated by Frank Frazetta





J. Rott

interview;



manly wellman

The fiction of Manly Wade Wellman has enthralled readers of fantastic literature since the appearance of his first professionally published story in the November, 1927 issue of *Weird Tales*. Since that time, under his own name and nine (known) pseudonyms, literally a mountain of work has emerged from his fertile imagination including everything from mystery stories and comic books to SF interstellar adventures and plays concerning the Civil War.

Mr. Wellman was born May 21st, 1903, in the village of Kamundongo in what is now known as Angola, where his father was stationed as one of the few medical officers in the area. Service life meant much travel and Manly spent a good portion of his early days in such exotic climates as Africa, England, and Wichita, Kansas (where he attended college on a football scholarship and graduated with a B. A.).

Coming from a family of writers, Manly was influenced by their skill and his love for story-telling into making it his profession, despite discouraging attitudes from friends and teachers. Undoubtedly, he can take immense pleasure in showing them "just how wrong they were" in criticizing his stories of the supernatural and macabre.

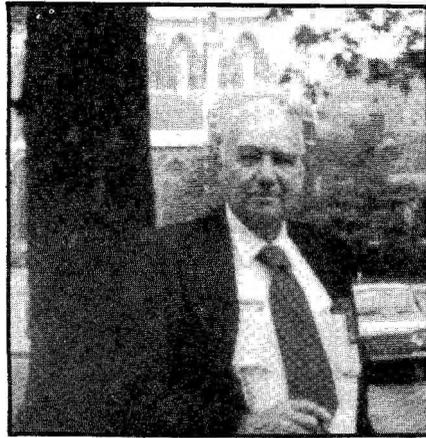
While it's true that Mr. Wellman sold to all of the major markets throughout the '30s up to the '70s (including *Astounding*, *Startling*, and *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*), his most famous, and perhaps most popular, series was reserved for the pages of *Fantasy & Science Fiction: the adventures of John the Balladeer, a wandering minstrel of the Appalachias who battled supernatural evil with his wits, occult knowledge and a silver-stringed guitar. The series (with new additions appearing from time to time) was collected in Arkham House's Who Fears the Devil anthology, and recently a film was made based on the character and two of the stories featured therein.*

Manly, after a lifetime of world wandering, now lives with his wife, Frances, in a rustic cabin on the side of Walnut Mountain in North Carolina. Karl Edward Wagner, a close friend of the Wellmans for more than a decade, was kind enough to lace up his boots and hike the distance to conduct the following casual conversation with one of the truly legendary figures in the *Fantasy and SF* fields. As a final note, for those interested in a more complete Wellman biography—as well as an invaluable checklist—*Nightshade* no. 3 will prove worthwhile.

CHACAL: Manly, I suppose most fans probably think of you as a writer from the Southeast—a chronicler of mountain ballads and myths from the North Carolina region. Yet, you weren't actually born around here. . .

Wellman: I was born in a land which I can't just now go back to: Angola, in West Africa. My father was a medical officer with the American Board of Foreign Missions. I was born there 73 years ago, came to this country—I've lived in a great many parts of the U. S., but I feel best of all right here in North Carolina.

CHACAL: I wonder if you could tell us a little something about how it was that you



started writing fantastic fiction. How does a writer really get started in this genre?

Wellman: Well, I think that you have to get started fairly early in life—few people at 40 can walk off the job and become a popular author. Damn few. I always wanted to be a writer—as long as I can remember, even back to the time that I was a little boy I wanted to write. And as it was with me, and probably the same with many other youngsters, I was advised against it by many sober acquaintances and teachers and relatives. I think I wrote because I had to—it's a little like running away from a bear: you've got to or he'll chomp his teeth in a sensitive spot. I lived in Africa until I was 6, we were pretty much the only white people for miles around. There was a very strong folklore and legendry among the natives—I used to listen avidly to their stories when I was a little boy. I don't think you have to be born in West Africa to spark your imagination—when we're children, the wonders and often the terrors stay with us, help to make us into what we'll someday be, and in some cases, someday write. Influences are important. I didn't always write fantasy literature—I've written a number of books which are intensely realistic. But I stay with fantasy because I have to, because there's interest in it and because now and again, I sort of feel young again by writing it. I don't really know how a writer gets started, to answer your question, Karl—it's something that has to be worked at. If you've got talent, then a good editor will recognize it. The trouble for most young people is finding a good editor these days.



CHACAL: As I remember, one of your teachers in high school had a few remarks about one of your earliest stories, which later saw print in *Weird Tales*—I believe it was titled "Back to the Beast."

Wellman: Yes, bless her heart; she wanted us to write pretty little stories about dear little children sniffing wildflowers like the characters in our grade school primers, John and Jane. Instead, I wrote this story and in red ink on the margin she wrote, "Your work is impossible! What makes you think you can write?" and I was duly squelched. A little later in college, I dragged the thing out, looked it over and said, "Is it as bad as all that?" I worked it over, mailed it to Farnsworth Wright at *WT*—he made me revise it extensively, he was very good at that, one of the best—and whaddaya know, they bought it. Frankly, I don't think it's an awful good story as I look at it today. It wasn't "impossible," that it got printed shows that it wasn't. The first sale determined me to stay with it and I've been making a living writing for more or less crowding 50 years. It's not easy work—I wouldn't say I'd scorn to do anything else, but I'd hate not to be able to write.

CHACAL: On the cover of *Thrilling Tales*, which featured your story "When the Lion Roars," you were blurbed as the "King of Jungle Fiction." How'd it feel to be a "king" with you, I think, sixth published tale?

Wellman: My friends in college—all of them were going to be writers and some of them have it still to do—were delighted by my "title" and I think it was Rufus W. Carroll who would call me "The King of Bungled Diction." He became a fairly popular book critic—but I didn't care. I had a story in print and I was paid for it—I remember thinking, "Just wait until I'm the new Shakespeare, that'll show 'em." I never quite reached that level, but thinking about it, I have had more work in print than all of my old college chums put together.

CHACAL: Many of your schoolmates didn't believe you were writing the various stories that were seeing print. . .

Wellman: They thought I copied them—they couldn't believe that this big slob of a football player with adhesive tape stuck all over his face could really have a brain enough to write fiction and poetry. Granted, it wasn't great stuff, but I never copied. I went to work on a newspaper after I graduated and didn't particularly like it. Times were hard, this was around 1930, and I guess foolishly I quit and took up writing full time. I wrote then because I had to, not because some inner spiritual fairy whacked me with a wand—it was "Die dog or eat the hatchet." I had to write, I did, and it eventually paid off for me.

CHACAL: You worked for the *Wichita Eagle* and the *Wichita Beacon* newspapers. . .

Wellman: We had one of those volatile and furious managing editors that are popular figures in everything from movies to comics and he would shout and scream and curse. He came down to the office one day with a hangover, started yelling and I told him to

go to hell. I got my coat, walked out and felt free for the first time in a while. I took up writing full time—it was hard getting in print constantly, it seemed that everyone was competing with you. I used to have as many as 40 manuscripts in the mail at one time—if I sold 2 of 'em, my wife and I could have ham and eggs, and if I didn't, we'd learn to do without. Admittedly, I never missed a meal—never was late to one, either—but it was difficult. Let me tell you, it was *hard*. Someone called writing the last independent profession—I think it's also the most difficult and if there aren't very many successful writers around, it's because success in this field is a better goal to achieve.

CHACAL: After living in Wichita for about a year, writing for your various pulp markets a time, you packed up and moved to New York.

Wellman: I felt New York was where I'd better go—that's where *all* the publishers used to be, all the books, all the magazines—and if I lived closer, I might get a little better break. I did and started making about \$200 or so a month—it wasn't princely or anything, but you could live fairly well. You could even afford to slip a couple of bucks to some friend who had nothing. I was able to get along well with editors—at the time I was writing SF and fantasy—there was more money in writing about getting on a space ship and taking off for Alpha Centauri than writing about werewolves or ghosts for *WT*. But I think I was always better at and happier with writing fantasy. I was fortunate in having a splendid editor—I know he's a controversial figure—Farnsworth Wright of *Weird Tales*. He'd work *with* you—but let me tell you, his friendship would end when you submitted a story he didn't like. He'd give you criticism and give it back to you. He was a great man to work with—it must've been wonderful to have been like Augie Derleth and Frank Long to have worked with him while they were still in their teens—a kind of father figure. You know, he bought Tennessee Williams' worst story and he bought Ray Bradbury's first story—give a popular writer's name and Wright probably published work by them. He insisted on good writing from his contributors and most of the time, though not always, he got it. He'd get the last drop of pretty writing he could squeeze from you and I'll say again he was a good editor—I think he's the best I ever worked with and I've worked with some fine people.

CHACAL: Wright rejected your first story, though.

Wellman: It came back to me with a rejection slip which said, "It took us three readings to decide it was not quite right for *WT*—if it were only a little smoother." I was looking at the rejection slip with a face as long as a hoe handle and an old reporter, a Kentuckian, Kent Eubanks, came by and said, "What's the matter, kid; you look like you lost your last friend," and I showed it to him. He said, "Damn you, don't you know that means for you to do it over one more time?" and I remember how he grabbed my wrists and put my hands on the typewriter and told me to go back to work. I did and they bought it.

Wright was like that—my wife Frances wrote a story for him called "The Forbidden Cupboard." After she had revised it 3 times—that makes 4 drafts—he said that he'd buy it if she'd rewrite it one more time. And she did. I know about people like HPL or Derleth or whoever that never had to revise anything, but they were HPL and Derleth: I'm Manly Wade Wellman and I think revision is a good thing; I think I'm a good reviser—I *expect* to revise. Revision is one of the 1000 or so secrets of success.

CHACAL: You had a rather distasteful run-in with Hugo Gernsback after he printed what is essentially your first book, The Invading Asteroid.

Wellman: I know he was a pioneer, but frankly, he was very difficult to work with—not so much selling to him, but getting your money afterwards. Well, I won't go into these things—they're always unpleasant. Essentially with Hugo, first you had to ask for your money and then you had to demand it and then you finally had to make a scene in the office for it. But candor forces me to say that that was the way it was with the great Hugo G. and his boys.

You know, a branch of the Rosicrucians read *The Invading Asteroid* and wrote me, telling me that my story was a revelation of great cosmic truth, pointing out mystical emanations like Shakespeare and Bacon had—I wrote back and said that I hadn't meant any of those things. A letter came back saying that I had an unconscious psychical gift and later a couple of fine old gentlemen came around and asked if I'd like to come out and live in California in their installation and write and think and so on. You know, if I'd been a bachelor, I might've taken them up on it, but they wanted just me, not my wife.

CHACAL: There was one occasion, wasn't there, when you stormed down to Gernsback's office to demand he return one of your stories; he wasn't in the office at the time, though.

Wellman: David Blasser was.

CHACAL: What happened?

Wellman: Well, it was all over a story they had "bought," and I use the term loosely—I later sold it to Orlin Tremaine at *Astounding*. Anyway, I walked into the office—they wouldn't pay me for the thing—and I remember that I must have had a burst of ESP because I was talking to Blasser and said, "The story's in that file," and pointed to it. That kind of took him aback and he opened up the file and gave back my story. There's a little more unpleasantness that I won't go into—Blasser was about half my size and couldn't walk nearly as well as I can *now*, even with this broken hip of mine.

CHACAL: You say that you sold the story to Astounding after that incident?

Wellman: Sure did. Now this was during the Depression and I got \$150 for it—hell, if you had \$150 at that time, bulging in your pocket, you thought for a moment that you'd never have to work again. That seems as fantastic as the actual stories themselves, I know, but

that's the way it was. That was the turning point in my struggle as a writer, you know: I ceased at that time to be worth \$10 a shot and jumped in value to \$150 per story. And I did my level best to keep it that way. I wrote all the way up to the war—I did a little military service and went right back to writing when I got out. As long as there were pulps, you could make a living—they *needed* stories, *publishable* stories, and they were happy to sit down and talk to you about your work.

CHACAL: How was it living and working in New York during the Depression?

Wellman: It was a rather good life, if you can *ever* say that about living in the New York area. I used to get together with a group of SF writers at Steuben's on 47th St. It was a place with good plain German cooking and we could sit at a rear table—they expected us every Thursday. We would have drinks and if we ordered 35c worth of German fried potatoes, well, that'd last everybody all afternoon. Julius Schwartz was my agent then and he would usually be there; Otto Binder, Frank Belknap Long, Malcolm Jamison, Seabury Quinn or maybe Ed Hamilton, Jack Williamson or Eric Frank Russell when they were in town, they'd show up. We were good friends—always helping each other out. Sometimes, I think of how many have died since. You'd come away from Steuben's on a Thursday afternoon feeling you could write, could overcome any problem that had you buffaloed earlier in the day. Of all my memories of New York, I think I miss this fellowship the most.

CHACAL: You wrote for the comics in their "Golden Age;" did you think of it as challenging work?

Wellman: Writing for comics was very easy—you could write \$100 worth of "squinkus," as we called them, story treatments, in a day or so. I never was what I'd consider an important figure in the comics industry—and I was writing a number of other things while I worked for them: novels, some fantasy and a little history. I must say that the comics I see today are better drawn and produced—there are serious people working on them to make them a good product.

CHACAL: What were some of the early comic titles you wrote for, Manly?

Wellman: Oh, I wrote quite a few *Spymasters*, *League Ranger*, things like that—and I did a great many *Captain Marvels*. You know, Captain Marvel was quite a controversial character—he was a satirical treatment of *Superman*—and I think that a lot of people will agree with me that he was a better Superman than Superman himself! He wound up in a terrific lawsuit for plagiarism and *Captain Marvel* went out of business—and who do you think brought him back recently? The people who publish *Superman*.

CHACAL: You also wrote some episodes of The Spirit—is that right?

Wellman: Oh yes. Will Eisner created a mighty fine character in *The Spirit*—that was one of the best and required a little attention to what you were doing. I enjoyed writing for

him as much as anything.

CHACAL: Around 1939, Wright left the editorship of Weird Tales, but you stayed with the magazine practically until its last issue. I believe your John Thunstone series spanned a 3 year period for them with installments appearing in almost every issue. What was it like working for WT after the Wright years?

Wellman: Well, I was selling to most of the other markets at the time, but I felt a certain loyalty to *WT* and I stayed with them. I missed Farnsworth a great deal, but his replacement, Dotty McIlwraith was a fine old girl and maybe she flattered me a bit, that's why I say that. She had an assistant, Lamont Buchanan—yeah, the John Thunstone thing caught on and they kept after me to write and write and write. I'm glad they did. But *WT* really wasn't the same without Wright—I make no mention of the effort to revive it recently other than it deserved to fail—Wright was a scholarly, highly intelligent man and he'd do his best to sit down and go over things with you. Which isn't to disparage Dotty or Monty—but I didn't *seem* to need so much help when I was writing for them and I really wonder if my work was as good.

CHACAL: Wasn't Lamont Buchanan actually editing much of WT at that time, despite his lack of credit on the masthead?

Wellman: Pretty much, but the point was that Dotty was head of the operation and she would primarily edit short stories, which were what I was contributing. Monty was a friendly fella—he was sort of a dark Leslie Howard in appearance and manner. I don't know where he is at this moment, we were pretty good friends. I hope he's doing all right. He was a good editor, but he never put the gaff in me the way Wright did; maybe I didn't need it much. I must say that having an editor who is constantly critical is an awfully good thing for a young writer—they shouldn't get mad at him because he's only trying to get a better story out of you. That's his job. Ahh, but *Weird Tales* went into the land of the hereafter—good mags died like flies for awhile there. Today, the best chance you have for seeing your work in print is in writing fantasy and science fiction and if you make it into the magazine of that name, *F&SF*, you're doing all right, son!

CHACAL: Your stories began to take on a distinctly regional flavor, your John the Balladeer series being the most notable. How much of this has to do with your moving South?

Wellman: I was fortunate enough to win a big chunk of money—a detective story prize from the first *Ellery Queen Detective Story* contest—and I used to come back down South. While I hadn't lived in the South for many years, I was and am a Southerner, by inheritance and by association. I was glad to come back—I was writing serious hardcover books at the time, a number of Confederate histories and regional histories. I guess it was only natural that my fiction began to take on this flavor.

CHACAL: You moved into the Chapel Hill

area in 1951—your characters followed close behind. In fact, you had John Thunstone leave his New York stomping grounds and come into the sand hills of Mort County. I believe.

Wellman: How could I leave them behind?

CHACAL: Has living in Madison County helped your writing? It's quite isolated. . .

Wellman: It's set back beyond everything else; you can't get in except through a single road through a water gap. The people here hang on to the old ways, I'm happy to say. The music they make is wonderful and they're greatly influenced by their folklore—they're *great* to listen to. I made friends almost at once with these people, some very choice friends, and they've given me bunches of ideas for stories about John—and I really don't know what his last name is, either, in case you were going to ask. John the Balladeer seems like enough. I was told not to tell the folks up here what I did for a living at first, so I didn't—but it really didn't matter to them at all. They read my stories, liked them, and told me more folktales until I had enough material for a book. Augie Derleth, God rest his soul, wanted to make a book of them and did for Arkham House. Funny, my thought at the time was if I had this book, I could give some copies to my friends around here—I didn't give much thought to the popularity of it. As it turns out, *Who Fears the Devil?* sold awfully well, became a paperback here and abroad—I'm glad I wrote it.

CHACAL: You mentioned your love for mountain ballads and music. . .

Wellman: Ever since I was a boy I've loved the stuff. As a young man I had the chance, a wonderful chance, to travel with Vance Randolph, the folklorist, through the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas and Missouri. He had friends *everywhere*—let me tell you, if mountain people have heard and like your stuff, they love you and if they don't, they won't speak to you. But they spoke to him and loved him—I used to sit and listen wide-eyed to their songs. I used to pick the guitar a little and sing—I still hum them under my breath. Very old songs with archaic modal scale; it's a heritage that this nation has done something toward preserving, but they could do more. You know, it used to be that if you were a well-bred Southern boy and came into a strange house, they might ask, "Would you like to take the guitar and pick us something?" thinking you ought to be able to—and I could. A little. Mountain music is stirring; it *speaks*.

CHACAL: You stopped writing fantasy and science fiction in the early 60's, Manly, and spent most of your time producing non-fiction and juvenile stories—in fact, you were nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for one of your Civil War histories. . .

Wellman: I was just nominated, never actually won it. The book was called *Rebel Boast*—it's an account I was able to put together from old letters and family histories about five young men who went from Halifax County here in North Carolina into the first battle, the battle of Bethel. Two of them lived to be in the last charge at Appamattox. First

to the last—I'm proud to say it's been recently reprinted.

CHACAL: You've gotten your hand back into writing F&SF recently, within the last five years—material for Witchcraft and Sorcery, F&SF, Whispers, some anthologies. What brought you back?

Wellman: I know you didn't pop me a leading question, Karl, but you're gonna be surprised: *you* had as much to do with it as anybody. When we met some years back, you'd read my stories and we talked about them. You were becoming successful in the field and you used to gaff me into re-entering my old stomping grounds. There were other reasons, of course—I was teaching for awhile and when I retired from that, I had more time. Fantasy is my first love and you never quite forget your first love—you might neglect her now and again, but never forget her. But you had a considerable amount to do with it, Karl, and I'm very grateful to you for it—the editors and the readers welcomed me back so readily that I don't think I'll ever leave again.

CHACAL: What do you think of the present state of affairs in the F&SF field?

Wellman: It's pretty solid, I think. There's a lot of young people with fresh ideas and I think they'll help expand on the groundwork that's already been laid. Editors *do* need to give new writers help and encouragement and not expect them to fit into a mold established by others. Personally, I'm tired of all the ghost-writing going on for Robert E. Howard's ghost—it's not fair for a young writer to compete with someone who's been dead for 40 years for a market. I don't like the idea of books being blurbed, "In the Howard tradition;" if you write or Dave writes it, it should say, if anything, "In the Wagner tradition" or "the Drake tradition." You know, Karl, there are so few people who can make it as full-time writers today; they should get the credit they deserve. You and I are mighty scarce animals, now—we're *full-time* writers. Kind of like the last of the dinosaurs!

CHACAL: Worse Things Waiting, the hard-back short story collection from Carcosa Press, won the World Fantasy Award last year and we've plans of printing two more volumes. You've also got several stories slated for Whispers, F&SF, Chacal—what else have you got in the works?

Wellman: I have a historical novel which I'm not going to talk about—it may be bad luck—but I've been working on it for a number of years and I hope to get it out. There's always something to write and I don't want to stop—not as long as anybody wants to read me.

CHACAL: Well, Manly, from The Invading Asteroid to your most current work, The Beyonders, for Warner Paperbacks, you've written over 70 books, including everything from history to fantasy to science fiction to juvenile adventure—even a Sherlock Holmes novel. I think that I can say for all of fandom that we hope you'll produce many more.



"Davey, Davey Kraken, the Old Thing of the Sea!"

THE NEXT TO THE LAST VOYAGE OF THE CUTTLE SARK

by M.M. MOAMRATH Edited by BILL WALLACE & JOE PUMILIA

Illustrated by Vikki Marshall

Introduction: *The ocean comprises some ¾ of the earth's surface. In mankind's oldest myths the sea is a repository of dark mysteries. In literature it symbolizes man's subconscious and his primitive origins, and was the primary setting of important works of literature by such authors as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, Joseph Conrad, and M. M. Moamrath.*

Unkinder critics have avowed that Moamrath's tremendous series of sea stories (most of which appeared in Sargasso Sea Stories between Aug., 1934 and Dec., 1938, and in its short-lived companion Tales of Mildewed Ships) were lifted almost bodily from the tales of English author William Hope Hodgson. Despite certain superficial similarities growing on the surface of their respective works, such claims are rather far-fetched.

This story—the last in his "Cuttle Sark" series—is interesting for a variety of other reasons, none of them worth mentioning.

The manuscript was found in a trunk abandoned by a heavily muffled tenant in a waterfront boarding house in New Yuggoth, Connecticut, and represents the most authoritative text we have yet uncovered. There was a puzzling aspect to that particular discovery in that, although the uncommonly large handwriting was undoubtedly Moamrath's, the ink on the final page was not yet dry. This was explained by the excessive dampness of the rooming house, but caused us some concern at first. . .

It was a cold and starless night, thirty-nine days out of Nanthuckett. We was still becalmed in the sea o' floating weeds, but at least the molluscs had abated somewhat. Cap'n Shadrach says it must have been the plague ship—the one as was manned by skeletons—had scared 'em off. Scared off some the crew, too, I reckon—the twelfth mate's been missing since Friday. Said he'd seen one of the dead men beckon. Shadows, I guess, or one of them queer fancies as takes a fellow too long out of sight of dry land. Nights like tonight make a man see things on the sea. Now take that island there, the one humped up like a great, black toadstool. T'warn't there yesterday and probably it won't be there tomorrow.

Cabin boy swears as how he saw an old three-master off the port bow, had a living man hoisted up where their flag ought to have been, and him screaming about Barnacles with the Faces of Mice and Sea Slugs as

long as Boa Constrictors.

And the fifth mate being eat up by that fungus last month when we was becalmed in that other sea o' floating weeds. Worst part o' that were the fish—sargassum fish matin' in the weeds. Noise kept us all awake—that and the keel rubbin' at the weed bladders with a sound like air escapin' from a dead man's lungs. Had to ask Mr. Scrimshad to play his fiddle, hideous as it was, to drown out them other sounds. *S. S. Beast of the Apocalypse* hailed us yestereve in a sarcastic manner: "Parrots keeping you busy, Feargodd Shadrach?" But the cap'n paid it no mind, sayin' as how the ships you can see through can't hurt you none.

No sign of the Brindled Squid for many days. Found a piece of Miss Thana Topsy's nightgown fluttering from a piece of driftwood last week. We are still passing Nor'east, along the mating route of the great squid. Strain is terrible. Mr. Stillborn has lain a day and night in the fore head, groaning in delirium. "The creeping mold!" he would shriek incessantly. There was some question as to whether he cried cold or mold. "Must have been cold," said Teaky Lee, brushing some fungus off his biscuit. "Been rather cold and damp these last days. Seems to make this fungus grow."

Out on deck Quahog, the ship's Indian, sat cross-legged by the stern and stared out over the water. "Any sign of the Brindled Squid?" I asked him. "The one Cap'n Shadrach is looking for?"

Quahog made a cryptic and brief motion with his hand which conveyed to me in its savage eloquence that Cap'n Shadrach was not looking for the Brindled Squid alone, but that in his search he was actually looking for a meaning in the great swirling maelstrom of human existence, where we are all tossed like bits of flotsam or tiny boats without sails or even oars to propel us through the great sea of moral dilemma and meaninglessness.

I nodded in mute agreement. I had shared a room with Quahog back in Nanthuckett before we had embarked. He had offered a bloody sacrifice to a little bottle of Dr. Hodgson's Seven Seas Serum of Hope which had once saved him from an attack of merimeri, a hideous disease of the South Sea Islands as causes the sufferer such a bad craving to eat Norwegian Cod as he will sell his soul to get some or perish from the longing, and what was left of the inn-keeper he ate himself.

Quahog hails from Wyoming, where his father is a deacon of the Presbyterian Church, his twelve wives comprising the choir.

Some hours before the attack of the crabs I heard the cap'n's voice shouting. "I have had enough of this stillness and fog!" he cried. "All hands look alive! Pretzel up them jibooms there, Mr. Scrimshad! Reprimand the spankers smartly, lads! Trepan the jabberwocks! Step to it lively, boys! Circumcise the foresails or I'll keelhole your mizzen-masts!"

I stood aside and watched as was my wont while Scrimshad, Teaky Lee, and the rest scaled the rat-lines and ran ankle-deep across the mold covered decks. Quahog carried his mildew-covered wooden albatross for luck.

"Shibboleth the mainbraces, now!" called Captain Shadrach.

Suddenly Beri-Beri, the rather pretty cabin boy, came bursting from the mizzenhatch, his face astream with tears. "Oh captain, captain," he cried, "Lordy me! It's Mr. Stillborn, sir, dead in the after berth!"

The captain looked down. "What got him, lad?"

"I don't rightly know, sir, only he was covered all over with a grey mold like wet dust."

"Couldn't have been that, boy. He's been like *that* for weeks!"

Satisfied to leave the matter unsettled, Cap'n Shadrach looked back out over the sea, his icy blue eye always probing the distant horizons for sign of the great mottled cuttle fish that had stolen his daughter. There was a story too, that the great squid was not a creature of this world, but a minion of Davy Kraken, of whom the sailors sing:

"Born in a fissure in the Permian Sea
With carp and minnows in his family
tree,

Raised by Dagon until he was three,
Then he ravaged the earth for a century.

(chorus)

Davy, Davy Kraken!
The Old Thing of the Sea."

They said it had stolen the captain's soul as well. When I mentioned this aloud Quahog gestured to say it was only metaphorical.

But, in any case, the captain persisted in ordering us about, unfurling more sheet and rigging more lines, belaboring parricides and berating the foc'sle bo'sun—all to no avail for no breath of wind had stirred in many days. After some hours of these futile cha-

rades, we took time out to bury poor Stillborn. The lads lined up on the decks, now well cleared of mold from all the running about, and listened to Cap'n Shadrach read from the Campdown Shards. The body of the mate was put over the side, causing a great sort of splash, after which the gnashing and grinding of great claws was sickeningly audible. In seconds the huge monsters were crawling over the rails, not one of them less than three feet, four or five inches across. The muskets were broken out and Mr. Grimkerion brought to bear upon the monsters the harpoon gun in our bow. Pikes and axes were handed among the men, and a wholesale devilling of the crabs ensued. The blades sank readily into the pallid, embarnacled carapaces of the great crustaceans, these being giant, soft-shelled crabs, less common than the giant hard-shelled variety, but not quite so rare as the Giant Horseshoe, which is found only in the algae reefs surrounding the forbidden island of Fungo-Fungo in the Pharkodes Islands. The slaughter was hideous, reminding me somewhat of an incident at Mrs. Fendreary's garden party when Captain Shadrach attacked an empty parrot cage.

After a time the deck was cleared of the multi-jointed monstrosities, the last clicking clawed crab scuttling over the side to disappear beneath the uneasy weed-choked surface. Miraculously, none of our party had suffered serious injury.

"Ere them be the things speaked of in the Shards?" Oakum Pitchacalk asked me, "the things with slouch hats that swim in the sea?"

"No, those are the Sea Anonymities," I told him. "These were Giant Crabs."

"Crabs, eh? Well I bet I know what we'll be eating for the next week."

And in truth the cook, MooGoo, whose left arm ended in a frying pan, even as the man spoke, was scurrying around the deck scooping up blood emnants. "Clabs fol blekfast!" he said with the cheerful glee of his race. "Clabs fol lunch! Clabs fol dinnah! We eat clabs fol evah!"

The small yellow cook scuttled around the deck chickling. Suddenly he shrilled, "Ooooooeeee! This not clab meat! Come look! Come look! What? This clab weah lace undies! Come look!"

The lads cowered around the gibbering yellow man, and I saw with my own eyes that the crab wore white pantaloons edged with eyelet lace. When Cap'n Shadrach saw this, his face turned white as three sheets in the wind.

"These are Thana Topsy's undies!" he gasped. "The are, I perceive, white linen undies with a drawstring at the waist, with white lace and the word 'Monday,' as you can see, embroidered in the nether region. And you will recall, that it was upon a Monday that my dear child was abducted by the Brindled Squid."

"There, sir, don't excite yourself. We'll find her sooner or later. I believe strongly that there is a destiny which shapes all our ends, gathering our purposes like waters within a tidal pool cast upon the great strand of life, where our whims sport like tiny shellfish before they die and build up in great chalky deposits that determine the worth of a man's life. All our suffering is to a pur-

pose. . ."

"Perhaps you are right, Mr. Antichristian. I hope so."

Musing to myself I left the captain and walked aft, carrying a bucket of swill, to perform my daily duty. At length I encountered our young Hispanic carpenter, Jesus. Beneath a mass of hair blonde as lamb's wool, his eyes, clear as holy water, stared out across the sea. A look of perfect innocence transfused his being as he stood there, arms held out at right angles to his body, blood flowing from his hands and side from wounds he had received in the battle with the crabs. "Have you a reading, Jesus?" I asked him. "Why does your sextant waver so?"

"Star Wormwood won't hold still, sir," he said. There was silence about us for the space of half a minute or so, and then he turned back to me, a look of tenderest mercy in his eyes as he spoke. "Mr. Antichristian, sir, I wonder sometimes if this quest we are bent upon is a proper thing. Our purpose, sir, in this ship is a noble one betrayed, for is it not our appointed task in the world to supply cuttle bones to the caged fowl of the earth? Who, prithee, sir, will keep their little peckers sharp if we fail in our nigh-sacred trust? For, sir, is their plight not like that of man, who, so long as he stays within his cage of flesh, must yet keep the beak of his mind sharp?"

I nodded in mute agreement, brushing some of that accursed mildew from my sleeve. The utter grayness of our surroundings, being, as they were, entirely fog, was beginning to play strange tricks on me. Item: the halo around young Jesus' temples. Item secundus: the weird voices that seemed to emanate from the obfuscated atmosphere. I paid them no heed and, losing sight of Jesus, went on about my duty.

While I walked I thought over Jesus' words. Ever since that ill-famed day two years ago (or two years and a month to the day, come next Haremas*) when the great Brindled Squid had carried away the young, but attractive daughter of poor Captain Shadrach. Our quest for cuttle was cut short at that point and the Captain began to direct us in a great, erratic search for the tentacular cephalopod who had borne away his most prized possession. And indeed, there was not a man of that crew, save perhaps for Jesus, who did not indulge in pleasures of a fleshly sort, who did not mourn the absence of that fair maiden who seemed somehow to embody the very mystery of the sea, with her eyes like great pearls with black circles painted on them, her skin fair as cuttle bone bleached in sunlight, the sweet smell of herring on her breath. . .

The tolling a great bell returned me to myself. I recalled the bucket of swill I carried and its ultimate purpose. . . but the bell, that great thunderous tintinabulation, that very apotheosis of DING DONG drew at ever atom of my consciousness. I sprang to the rail, every ear attuned to this audial apparition. At length I was capable of discerning a dim, eldritch shape upon the sea, limned in deeper grey. It was then I recalled the tales I

**Haremas celebrates the Feast of St. Rarebit, the Welsh saint who was martyred in boiling cheese.*

had heard of the HMS *Mark of the Beast*, the leper ship out of Liverwort. And indeed, between the clangs of the bell, I heard the cry from the top of the fo't'p'sail: "Unclean! Unclean!"

At once Captain Shadrach was at my side. "Ask if they have news of the Brindled Squid," he panted.

"Have you news," I shouted, "of the Brindled Squid?"

"Yes!" came the leprous cry. "The Brindled Squid is—"

Upon a sudden, from the sea, with much splashing and foaming, rose with ponderous mein and horrible demeanor, a vast and terrible tentacle which clasped about the waist of the ship, like a lover clutching his bride upon the wedding night, and dragged it under the waves. For some moments we heard the subaqueous tolling of the great bell, then all was silent.

"Evidently, Captain," I said, "they have no news to impart."

"Could this be an omen?" he wondered, staring into the foamy billows.

"We could put it to Nat," I said.

Captain Shadrach joined me on my interrupted pilgrimage to the bow, where Nat Profit lay lashed to the sprit in the manner of a figurehead.

"F-e-e-d m-e-e-e," he croaked weakly. I spooned the swill in huge dollops to his peeling lips. As I imparted sustenance to our figurehead, I began to become aware of a tremulous sound off the port bow—a voice, calling out.

"Hot enough for you?" it wailed.

Swift as a sea squirt, a voice off starboard answered, "How's the weather?"

"What?" I gasped, rushing to the railing.

Off in the distance, its source shrouded in fog, a voice called out, "Want to see some pictures of the wife and kids?"

Behind me Nat Profit gurgled, spat swill, and said, "They be Ye Shallow Ones, minions of ye not-so-deep."

"Who won the series?" came the wavering cry from port.

"It is said they waylay mariners and tell them tales of bargains gained in border towns, cozy restaurants on back streets, and amusing stories of small dogs."

"Is there meaning in their utterances?" I asked as Nat again filled his mouth with swill.

"Ask Jesus," he gurgled.

I was sure Jesus would have a meaning for me, but, alas, I had no chance to ask him. There was a grinding and a tearing beneath our feet where we stood in the bow. The ship shuddered along her entire length, and we learned later that our young carpenter had been accidentally crucified at his work. By all appearances we had run aground, but our navigator avowed there was no land in this region. Our position was reckoned somewhere in the general vicinity of Phungo Phungo, but not precisely in that location, so that this was not, as some had feared, the forbidden island itself.

A party was put ashore to reconnoiter the situation and I was among them. The first thing I noticed was at the spot where the bow had cut into the beach was a flowing of black fluid, rather like the bloody humours of a squid. I mentioned this to Captain Shad-

rach.

"Indeed it is like a squid's blood, Mr. Antichristian, and speaking of same, does not that promontory yonder remind you of the eyestalk of *bathyteucis*, or the great abyssal squid?"

"Why, yes," I replied, "and might I point out the texture of the land here, the pale, rubbery quality of it? Rather like the outer tegument of a squid, wouldn't you say?"

"Curious, isn't it," the captain said, "that this island unlike the previous 37 we have visited on previous voyages, this island hasn't a bit of fungus on it?"

"No, not as far as I can see through this fog," I replied. At that moment an albatross cried out three times. My eyes were drawn to Nor'east'ard, where I spied through the fog seven wakes upon the surface of the sea. In but a moment, creeping from the water onto the resilient surface of the beach were a septet of aquatic, flipper-bearing mammals. I called the captain's attention to this.

"Captain Shadrach, look—the seven seals!"

"By Godfrey, you're correct, Mr. Antichristian," he said. "Make an entry in the log!"

*The Seven Seals
Perform
Diverse Wonders*

ENTRY THE FIRST

In the sea do swim seven seals and the first seal does balance upon his nose a rubber trapezohedron, and the second does play upon his horn a tune not unlike "A Mighty Fortress is Our Cephalopod," and the third does beg for an ichthyous morsel, and the fourth did bring its flippers together with much force and bark like a dog, whereupon the ship's dog doth leap into the sea and drown, and the fifth does perform marvellous feats of acrobatic skill while improvising a version of "The Drunkard," that most worthy play concerning the evils of alcoholic indulgence, and the sixth does pass a cup for the WCTU, and the seventh doth sweep up behind the previous six.

*The Opening of the Seals
and
the Revelation of the Emblems of
Barrity, and Boredom and
Hydroelectric Power
and the
Increasing Popularity of Gelatin Deserts*

ENTRY THE SECOND

And Out onto the water did MooGoo venture in a fragile craft, crying all the while, "Oooo! Me makee seal pie, me makee seal casserole!" And I saw when the cook had opened one of the seals, he did cry out, "Come rookee, come rookee," and we did behold a barnacled and encrusted watch fob from which depended a barnacle encrusted watch which back bore the curious inscription, "Quid erat demonstrandum," and when the watch was opened there swam from out its works a remora.

And it was followed by a clam traveling on its jet of compressed water.

And then came the eel, with its body traversed by blue sparks.

And at the end, behold! A transparent medusoid swam from out the watch.

*The Opening
of the
Second Seal*

ENTRY THE THIRD

And when Moogoo had opened the 2nd Seal, lo, there was a vast quaking of the earth, and the sun became as the bottom of a cod liver oil bottle

earth, and the sun
Seal, lo, there was a vast quaking of the earth, and the sun became as the bottom of a cod liver oil bottle held at arm's length, and the moon became as mercurochrome.

*The Opening of
the Fourth Seal
and
the Departure of the Swallows
from
Capistrano*

ENTRY THE FOURTH

And when the fourth seal was split with the cleaver whose name is Stainless there issued forth the seed of the pestilence called Ye Brindled Death and 1/7 of the sailors aboard the ship flopped on the deck in the manner of a beached squid. Nor would they be roused from their antics by administrations of rum, nor by threats of keelhauling, and at last it was agreed to give them unto the sea, whereupon they each did swim away.

*The Disappearance
of
the Seals*

ENTRY THE FIFTH

And then did the very island upon which our feet were planted rise up, waving its tentacles in the firmament as so many rubber hoses, only more flat, and its great beaked mouth did open and a voice did cry out:

*The Adversary is Revealed
and
In His Name There Are
Three Meanings
First
That Which is Brindled Is Neither
Black nor White,
and
That the Squid is Blessed of
The Ancient Elderly Gods
and
That the Beast's Name has this
Significance.**

ENTRY THE SIXTH

"Behold! The Brindled Squid!"

**It seems clear that the marriage of Thana Topsy to the Brindled Squid has no clear meaning. Moamrath neglected to provide marginal commentary on this passage as he had wisely done earlier. There are divergent opinions among Moamrathians as to the meaning of this sequence. A union is clearly represented, but speculation breaks down over exactly what two things are being united. Rational thought and animal passions, spirit and flesh, mind and body, and pancreas and thyroid have all been suggested. Radical Moamrathians have suggested a union between man and God, but the absence of religious concerns in Moamrath's work would seem to preclude this hypothesis.*

ENTRY THE SEVENTH

And it did bear in its tentacles these things: Primus it bore a ring, bejeweled and beset with stones the size of large emeralds. Secundus, it bore a wooden altar, carved in the manner of sunken P'u. Thirdus it bore two men who did gibber and quake in terror of their plight. Fourth it bore a quill pen which it endeavoured to force upon the two men. Pentagonus it bore a piece of ancient parchment rolled into a cylinder and bound with a ribbon the color of cranberrie sauce. Sixth** it bore, tenderly round the waist, the gossamer-clad figure of Thana Topsy, which it did cause to be set down, whereupon its great tentacle, like unto an elephant's trunk with suction cups stuck onto it, did pat her upon her nether side before she did come over the rubbery squid flesh to the side of her father.

ENTRY THE EIGHTH

And Captain Shadrach, by virtue of the rights given unto a Captain of the sea, did perform the ceremony in deference to his daughter's wishes.

And so it is on these dark, foggy nights when we men of the briny vastnesses sink in spirits till we be too low to sing rousing chanties. Then it is that we cast our minds back over the years like a net, not knowing what strange fish or bits of odd flotsam or strange crustaceans, or seldom recollected snippets of nautical knowledge, or times we've had drinking bottles of rum and playing at Tugboats and Barges with tavern wenches, or strange silent crewmen with eyes that bulge out on stalks, or even if we'll bring our nets back at all.

Sometimes in the fog I squint my eyes and I swear I can almost see them all again. Cap'n Shadrach standin', starin' out over the open seas, or tryin' in vain to pry loose the gold coin he had nailed to the mast. MooGoo scuttles by, eternally cheerful. Nat calls out prophecies of disaster. Quahog a'gesturin' with savage eloquence. It's then when the cap'n always says to me, "Cease your games, Antichristian! Open your eyes and prepare to order us to cast off!"

For we're voyagin' out again onto that dark sea, and we go not to hunt the cuttlefish, for life is in a sense like a voyage over the years like a ship travels over waves, and some of us find our island paradises and some of us don't, and those of us who don't can hunt for whales or fish for tuna, it's all the same.

No, we go not to hunt the cuttlefish, but to keep the Captain company on his voyage to visit Thana Topsy and his son-in-law. They figured if they'd come back to Nantuckett people would have talked, so they went down to the South Seas to live with his folks. Seems the Captain got word from her that he's a grandfather and she wants him to come south and bring his ship and crew to help with the feedin' of the younguns.

But that there's a tale for when we return. □

***The original Manuscript read "Sexus," but the amendment was made in a 1952 reprinting in the journal of the Shifting Sands Baptist Church of Inbred, Mississippi.*



Marty Ketchum, Galena, Ks.

Finished *Chacal* last week, except for the Smith story which I'll wait on until I can read it in its entirety. My two favorites were the Wagner and Waldrop stories with Reamy right behind. The Howard story was good, but not something that I particularly want to see in *Chacal*: I know you're shy of denying REH his space—since he sells a lot of copies—but personally, I'd like to see most of the space going to someone else like Wagner or one of my favorites, George R. R. Martin.

Your British correspondent's column was a nice touch, but what you really need is someone to fill your readers in on the news of Cherokee County—and I'm the guy that can do it. Hell, fans can read about England any old time. A story about a sanitary land-fill is something all fantasy freaks can get into. Just trying to add a touch of class, guys.

One of you mentioned that Bud Plant suggested you lower your price and raise your print run. I, too, think this is a good idea and I'm sure you'd manage to do quite nicely. You couldn't buy Hefner's Chicago mansion, but you'd do all right—*Chacal* is better than *Fantastic* and they sell 20,000 copies. Remember, you have nothing to lose but your ass.

It's not that we're shy of denying REH his place in the magazine, Marty—if anything, we're trying to break away from our image as a strictly Howard-oriented publisher. We used "The Road of Azrael" last issue in order to draw in our regular LSF readers—a friendly sort of bait, if you will. We wanted to introduce the REH fans to the works of Waldrop, Wagner, Reamy, et al., while simultaneously wanting to expose SF fans (who would purchase the zine for these other gentlemen's work) to some good old fashioned heroic fantasy. Whether we turned off more people than we turned on is a question I can't really answer at this time.

Presently, we are negotiating with various SF celebrities such as Martin, Ellison, and Tuttle as well as Jakes, de Camp, and Moorcock, so I think that we can at least offer you a little variety in the future.

Believe me, I'd like to lower our price, raise our print run by another 15,000, use interior color, and pay our contributors more (among other improvements), but all of that requires a distributor. And as crazy as it sounds, we are making steps in that direction: it'll take a helluva lot of work, but we're optimistic and honestly feel that it can be done. Ahh, but we're more than our collective ass to lose, Marty; our sanity might fade as well. But I always was good at basket-weaving in the first place. . .

Wayne Warfield, Aberdeen, MD

Chacal is spectacular! Most impressive. Fiction, articles, art, production. . . all of most high quality. In fact, I don't know how you do it at \$3.50 per copy. A grand magazine with much potential.

Howard's "Road of Azrael" has that crisp, clean

imagery that made his good yarns such standout entertainment. A highlight, with a *very nice* Boas illo. Waldrop has got plenty of style, but this particular yarn did not "chill" me. In fact, I was not even surprised. From what I've heard, however, I'm in the minority here. Reamy, likewise, writes with a unique flair. This one interested me, kept me moving along the pages—but kinda just fell off at the end. Gods! What can one say about Wagner? "Valdese" was not greatly original and quite predictable. *But*, Karl could tackle just about anything, I think, and make it fascinating. He's the best living fantasy author actively producing we've got, and he never fails to entertain. This yarn was no exception.

C. L. Moore interview. . . I've seen a few reviews that criticized your "First Lady of Fantasy" blurb. Well, I suppose this all depends on one's definition of "first." In my opinion, your blurb was accurate and well put. It is most gratifying to see such a salute to one of the true greats of the genre. The interview was full of fascinating odds'n'ends, and is probably the best such interview you've run. My only complaint with it is that Byron played "yes man" with some very dumb replies that were obvious, and played cute instead of probing much of the time. Due to this, many areas were left unexplored and questions unasked. What is here from Ms. Moore is, nonetheless, great reading.

On a personal note, in looking over *Chacal*, I think I've uncovered a prime difference in our editorial approaches; which probably accounts for past misunderstandings between us. I tend to frown on the devil-may-care, cute, clique-ish ingroupishness you and Byron employ. A fan mag (or any mag) is only as good as its editor. It is the "personality" of the mag that I remember most once the zine is filed away. Many magazines have such similar content that only the editorial approach gives it identity. *Chacal* is damn near a pro mag, with fanish gosh-wow and/or outrageous editing. This, to me, is an unforgivable clash.

As one example, your "Editorial B. S.": I guess this is to show you don't take your stuff too seriously. I find it, on the other hand, fanish cuteness in a magazine that seeps with pro-ish cuteness. Your fan position is ever to ride the middle, be cute, do not make a stand, hey! look what fun we're having playing editor. I do not approve of this, and *Chacal* (like *LSF*) clashes with its editor(s). My approach is to take my work seriously, make definite statements in print in as few words as possible, usually trying to conclude on a light note. Yours is Stan Leeish. . . light, bouncing, bullshitting, lotta words but saying little. This is not to say that you are wrong, or I am right. Only that our approach is almost night and day. I brought it up in the hopes that we can discuss it and perhaps learn something from each other.

You've brought up a point which is admittedly perplexing to me. In the past, we've had one faction of

our readers who've considered our approach as "maudlin and far too serious," while another has agreed basically with your ideas on the subject. . . and of course, there's the silent majority sitting quietly in the middle. What to do?

I can't agree that I've said little in my previous editorials—while I might not have tossed out pontifical statements on the genre as seen through my eyes, I have given my opinions on various subjects and have discussed various features, policies and problems. But if anything, I thought that I was sharing some of my feelings with anyone caring enough to read them—it's never been my intention to be too "cute" (or too serious) and I'm sorry that you've interpreted my/our editorials that way. I simply wished to pass along some of my enthusiasm to the readers and I fear that I'll continue to try to do so in the future. . . I try to convey some part of my personality through my column and if it turns out to be similar to that of others, then I can only resign myself to being nondistinct. After all, I'd prefer to exhibit a true image of what I'm like, essentially, rather than act out a role that I can't believe in. I realize that I've been described as "the Alice Cooper of the fan publishers," but I'd like to think that I'm just as "bouncy" in person as I am in print.

There have been a few changes, though, as I'm sure you'll notice. Hopefully, Wayne, you'll feel they're for the better—but one way or the other, much thanks for passing your thoughts along.

(Check our news page for information on Wayne's and William Hall's magazine, Phantasy Digest.)

Robert P. Barger, Evensville, Tenn.

You come across as more or less apologizing for charging \$3.50 a shot for *Chacal*. Naturally, it would be nice to pay less for it, but even at your present price it is hard for me to see how you're breaking even. So. . . you'll hear no complaints from me on the price tag. I think it's reasonable.

My first impression of the color cover was that it was not too bad. Better than average for something like *Fantastic* (is that an insult??). The cover shows promise: I like it, though not *too* much, and think Easley will do better in the future. Jeff's full page illo for the Wagner story was about the same. However (and this is one helluva big "however"), I thought the portfolio, "Reflections On The Winter Of My Soul" was nothing short of excellent. As far as I'm concerned, these four pages were the highlight of *Chacal* no. 1.

I very much liked Tom Reamy's story—he's a talented craftsman. The story itself did not strike me as too original; perhaps slightly cliché. . . I really feel guilty about criticizing the work of Reamy because he is without a doubt a good writer. He deserved that Nebula. Maybe it's just because I've always disliked "Gothics" that I feel the way I do about "Mistress of Windraven." As to the Waldrop story. . . what the hell was it? No, really, I enjoyed it. But the ending was sprung on the reader with no previous suggestion that the story was going to be anything other than a good parody trip. Or is there a foreshadowing in the tale that I simply overlooked? The first thing I do when I receive Delap's Review is go through and pick out Waldrop's reviews. Every time I read one of his stories it seems to be better than the one I read before—either he is quickly improving as a fiction writer or he is slowly driving me as crazy as he appears to be. When he gets to the point where he writes fiction as well as he does reviews—and I'm sure he will, and soon—then he will be one hell of a fine author. He's already a major talent.

Alas, the turkey of the issue was, in my opinion, "The End of Days" by Smith. Somehow, it seemed to start out on the wrong foot—too much antecedent in the first part of the story; little action on the first page; too many tongue twisting names a la Lin Carter (and I guess *that* is an insult).

There is always a sense of doom and evil lurking just around the corner in a Kane story. There may

not be anything happening at the moment, but there's always that feeling that there sure as hell is going to be. Atmosphere! Wagner is better at setting the atmosphere for a story than even REH was. "Sing A Last Song of Valdeese" was Karl at his best—I'm anxious to see how he'll top it.

As I think I mentioned before, I thought *LSF* was a fine mag, but it simply didn't give you the freedom to realize your abilities. There are many writers of fine fantasy and they deserve to be included in a fanzine of such quality as *LSF* was—and *Chacal* is much more enjoyable than *LSF* could have ever been.

If you're going into the SF field, I'd like to see an art folio based around the creations of Cordwainer Smith. That is an author who is not appreciated as much as he should be and whose stories present wonderful scenes for illustrations. How about an article on Virgil Finlay or Margaret Brundage?

One last thing, I want to repeat my admiration for Jeff Easley's art. Absolutely fine!

I'm very happy that you enjoyed the "Reflections" folio, Bob, and I suppose that this is as good a place as any to apologize to Karl Wagner for the glaring typo in the title—it should read "Reflections For The Winter Of My Soul." Sorry, Karl!

We've got quite a few plans for the young Mr. Easley and now that we've got our hooks into 'im we're not about to let go. Presently, he's working on a special fantasy folio which we think will catch your interest. Keep an eye peeled for an announcement.

Also watch for a folio in a future issue based on the works of Cordwainer Smith—Pat's in charge of this particular project and she has quite a few surprises in store for us all. Other portfolios in the works include ones based on "Shamblau" by George Barr, "Twill" by Steve Fabian, "Beyond the Black River" by John Severin and a massive four part folio based on The Hobbit/The Lord of the Rings by some of the most talented artists in the field. But keep suggesting, we'll keep listening with the keenest of interests!

Ed O'Reilly, Ada, Ohio

Congratulations fellas—in my eyes at least, *Chacal*'s debut was an unqualified success. Being of an eclectic "fantasy" bent myself, I couldn't agree more with the intentions behind *Chacal*.

As for the 'zine itself? Well, having been an enthusiastic *REH:LSF* fan since no. 1, I was well aware of the superb quality you guys were capable of, and I thus had high expectations for *Chacal*. If anything, the actual product exceeded my expectations. The artwork was uniformly excellent throughout. Jeff Easley's cover painting was simply exquisite, and his Kane portfolio constituted the finest visualization of Wagner's powerful creation I've yet seen. His deftly shaded illustration for "Sing a Last Song of Valdeese" tied with Steve Fabian's masterful contribution for my favorite illo of the 'zine (and for a rabid Fabian fan like myself, that's one hell of a compliment). Rich Corben's back cover was delightfully malevolent. These were merely the standouts from amongst a field of fine illustrations in *Chacal no. 1*.

"Der Untergang..." was marvelously effective. Howard Waldrop constructed this satire-drama quite masterfully. The "twist" ending was not out-of-the-blue cheap shot, but rather a well-integrated, understated shocker. Very impressive.

"Mistress of Windraven" was also extremely well-structured. And you're right, Tom Reamy *can* write a mean Gothic passage.

"The End of Days" was nothing less than state-of-the-art heroic fantasy. How David C. Smith manages to avoid stereotypic and derivative approaches so neatly is beyond me—I mean, the guy is supposed to be a neophyte! Oh well, if for no other reason than the fact that it will contain the conclusion to this fine tale, *Chacal no. 2* will be eagerly awaited.

"Sing a Last Song of Valdeese": a Kane story, even if only peripherally. As such "... Valdeese" had

a lot going for it. It's nice to see that Karl Edward Wagner hasn't lost any of his power. The identity of the "priest" could have been a bit more effectively integrated into the body of the story, however.

The Hannes Bok article seemed to presuppose a good working knowledge of Bok and his art. As I have neither, it struck me very much as an "insiders" article—a couple of people reminiscing about an old friend I know nothing about. But that wasn't really the fault of the article, of course, and Ben Indick *did* provide useful footnotes for further reading.

The "Cross Winds" section was useful, though I'd suggest a brief description of the complications attendant upon international mail-orders. A currency conversion chart wouldn't be out of order, either (75 pence?).

In sum, *Chacal no. 1* was an auspicious debut. It was excellently edited and superbly produced. Take a bow, fellas (watch out for the table). Now, for the suggestions: I miss Byron's critical evaluations. I know I jumped all over you for "Vultures Over Cross Plains," but I'm glad the article was written and I'd like to see more like it. Let's get some clash of opinion going here. Also, a story with several illustrations (a la *REH:LSF*) would be a nice touch.

Thanks for the good words, Ed. As we move along getting older and wiser and more experienced, we will be trying our damndest to make CHACAL as graphically interesting as possible with layout and illustrations. However, one must bear in mind that a magazine such as ours is published to be read. Many of the letters received on REH:LSF ran to the effect of, "Wow! Great 'zine. I haven't read it yet, but it sure is terrific!" So while we will be seeking artwork to complement and enhance the stories or articles they go with (as well as isolated pieces for covers and things like that), we don't wish the art to so overshadow the writing that the majority of our readers can't be called "readers" in the strict sense of that term.

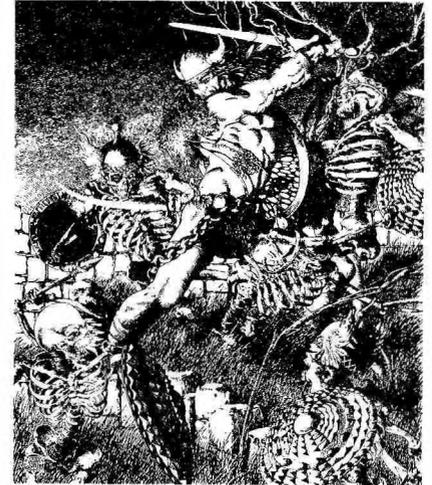
As to critical evaluations, there will be some appearing in future issues. "Vultures Over Cross Plains" was a sore lesson, though; there won't be anything more like that. "Critical evaluation" does not always translate as "ATTACK!!!" We don't intend to go bland, either, but controversy for the hell of it comes out as meaningless squalling.

So, What Happened To Destiny?



Quite simply, the photos wouldn't reproduce properly. Most were in color and we couldn't get a screen shot that would do the material justice. It's back to the drawing boards, gang—keep an eye peeled for further developments. We'll try not to let you down.

STERANKO PUTS OUT!



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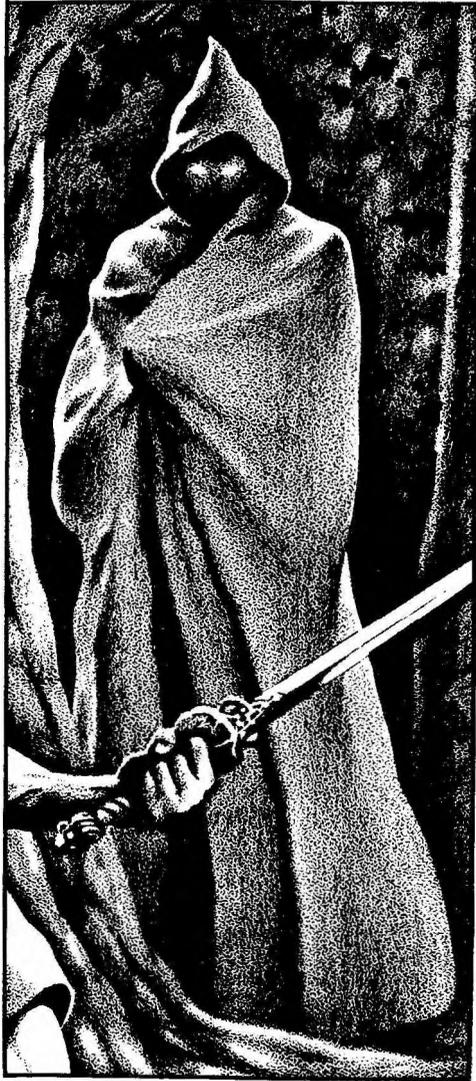


MEDIASCENE



The End of Days

Conclusion



by DAVID SMITH

Illustrated by Steve Fabian



Synopsis: For 7000 years hierophants had been predicting the "All-Night" which would bring an end to the world. Niror, a young scholar, had studied the texts; he knew it was coming. His best friend, Thedir, a soldier, could also see in the fall of the various kingdoms around their homeland the coming decline of civilization. Both of them realized that sooner or later, their own government would topple and civil war would erupt.

While Niror is visiting with Thedir and his sister, Yaslis, at their father's estate, a messenger arrives with the news that the King has been assassinated and rioting has started in the capital. The fate of the friends' fathers, both councillors who were in court at the time, is unknown. Niror rides to his home only to learn that his family has fled to his uncle's villa. Returning to Thedir's estate, he finds Yaslis accompanied by two soldiers—the deaths of their fathers are confirmed and Niror learns that Thedir has ridden to the city. While the soldiers tell of the wholesale slaughter of any and all gentry, they are set upon by an outraged mob. The soldiers are

killed but Niror and Yaslis manage to hide in a cellar.

Outside of the city, Thedir meets his company commander and rides with him and the troop to the neighboring kingdom of Horem.

At the end of the next day, Niror and Yaslis emerge from their sanctuary to find the estate burned. They decide to go south in an effort to escape further danger.

In Horem, officers, soldiers, and outcast gentry sit in council in an attempt to plan to regain the capital of their country. Commander Durres and his company bolt the council and camp outside the capital, building their ranks with deserters from the new ruler. Thedir stays with them, but ambition

has sparked plans of his own.

In the months that follow, Niror and Yaslis are reduced to wandering, searching at first for Thedir or Niror's family, but finally simply roaming the wastelands, mourning their pasts, homeless.

An unhuman but benevolent creature who calls himself Serenthall offers them shelter in a huge fortress in the desert. There, he tells them, they may live out their lives in peace, witness to, but untouched by, the coming All-Night. Physically and emotionally drained by the bloody fall of their country and their nomadic existence, they accompany Serenthall to the citadel.

Niror and Yaslis awoke late the following afternoon; dusk was descending as Niror climbed from their bed and went to a window, looked out upon the desolate landscape. He noticed dishes of fresh food and drink on the table, and he woke Yaslis: they ate and drank quietly. The room darkened quickly

about them. When they had finished their meal Niror took the one lighted torch on the wall and fired the others. He reseated himself by the girl's side and they spoke tentatively to one another.

lis. They spoke tentatively to one another.

Yaslis was frightened. She was reminded that what had happened to them yesterday had not been a nightmare. She looked about the room then eyed Niror anxiously. "What—do you think they'll do with us?"

Niror didn't know. He mused to himself, said: "We could leave if we want to. Serenthal told us that much. But I don't want to go outside this room until—"

The chamber door opened and Serenthal entered, carrying a number of rolled parchments under one arm and a small crystal globe in his other hand. He set these upon the table, then asked if Niror and Yaslis had slept well.

"Very well," answered Niror. "Only we've been wondering what's to become of us." He eyed Serenthal steadily.

Serenthal bowed his head. "I promised you last night that I would show you things. Now I will do that. You are both educated, I think. You are both renegades from humanity. Look you—"

Serenthal unrolled a parchment and displayed it to them, ran a finger over it. The parchment was covered with dots and graphed with lines, and crowded with intricate scribbles in some language neither Niror nor Yaslis had ever read.

"This chart is older than humankind," spoke Serenthal. "It show the ways of the heavens as the stars and constellations shift and move above us. See—here is the star Tyrothus, and its smaller twin Tyrathus. Now look out the window, at that constellation—to the east. Those are the stars. When Taisakul banished us from the lands, ages ago, those stars did not dwell there, but—here." He indicated a portion of the parchment, moved his finger along a curved line connecting the two stars—two dots—with many others.

"The ways of man and the ways of the gods and of all things, are measured by the stars and constellations in the night skies, by the fall of planets, by this infinite gyration. You know—you may have heard as a myth or legend—how these stars dictated that the elder serpent Kossuth might rise to the land and rule over men, or be banished to Hell."

Niror watched Serenthal tightly; the name of the elder serpent was the most ancient curse known to mortals and immortals both—so the priests said.

"Kossuth has arisen once more," Serenthal told them. "He lives now in his inhuman guise, in the northern lands, in what was Salasal—lives, fourteen hundred years after King Oron drove him down to Hell."

Yaslis moved closer to Niror, who eyed Serenthal sternly.

"I am not here to frighten you with these tales. Rather—" Serenthal rolled up the chart, pushed forward on the table his small crystal globe. He moved his hand over it and the black mists in it fumed and parted. "Here are things of earth which have occurred."

And Niror and Yaslis stared into the depths of the sphere and saw King Soris mur-

dered on his throne, and saw Lord Ambrul slain—stabbed many times—and the men of the Council knifing at one another. Yaslis gasped and momentarily turned away. Then the globe showed Niror himself riding furiously to and from his father's plantation, and the both of them hurrying on horseback, afterwards, and entering Gaegosh, and then Sour-os and Eru.

Niror slapped a hand on the table. "What of my own family?" he asked, glaring at Serenthal.

The globe showed him—it showed him his mother and his sisters and his uncle and aunt and cousins, all put to the sword by a crazed pack of displaced citizens and disowned soldiery. Niror's face went hard and brutal as he saw those things.

Yaslis leaned forward. "What of my brother, Serenthal?" she whispered. "Show me—please—"

The globe showed her, as Serenthal said: "He waits out the winter on the banks of the Serir beside Csithuum. He intends to fight with Captain Durres against Bargis and the other traitors."

"What will become of him?" Yaslis questioned earnestly.

The globe misted over. "The sphere cannot show you," answered Serenthal, "and I cannot show you. The future is veiled, to the sight of man and immortal both. But I can show you the acts of murder and deceit and treachery, the blood loosed and the flames fired and the steel broken, since that night you fled from Lord Ambrul's villa. I can show you all these things, all these acts of a despondent and frustrated mankind being thrown into its time of shadow—"

"No more," countered Niror harshly. His voice was cold; Yaslis looked at him. Niror tightened his fists on the table, stared unseeing at the globe. "I don't want to be reminded of it," he murmured slowly. He said nothing further, and there was silence for a time.

Then Yaslis looked up at Serenthal. "What now? Serenthal. Are we to leave this place? or—what—?"

Serenthal shrugged. "That is no decision of mine. You may return to the outer lands if you like; you are humans. But I tell you that if you go from here, you leave yourself to the mercy of the savages out there. What is for you, out there? Every person whom you knew has been slain. Chaos is out there. These people cannot fight against the tide of sorcery and night which is swallowing them—"

Niror asked him crisply: "Why do you want us to stay here, Serenthal?"

There was compassion in Serenthal's gaze. "I don't know," he answered. "I—I am unhuman, that is certain. But I am not Kossuth in the north, a thing so ancient that his memory spans the deaths of suns. I am not Ibkarad, who once owned Ibkarai and ruled a nation of earthbound things in the primal fens. I am not Sur-thuth, the monster sexless and gigantic, born when the children of the gods were born. I am a lesser creature. Yet I have arisen in times of old and walked the earth when men walked on it. When Oron ruled in Neria, I dwelt in the forests of Tol, and hungered for the night when Kossuth might slay him. I roamed the mountains when Salasal, long be-

fore, was torn from the woodlands and fields and made into a barbaric nation-state. I saw these things and I hated mankind for them, but I knew that Fate watched and that my destiny was tied not to mankind, but to those creatures that breathed beyond the stars and that raged in Hell and that swam in the seas beyond the world's rim. I knew all these things—

"But still am I a lesser being. I am less than the ancient demon-kings and demi-gods. I am—Serenthal, merely. An inhuman, only. But I am dispossessed. I have my own memories; I have desires and wishes, and they shall come to pass when the All-Night floods down. But I cannot turn my sight or my mind from men such as you, Niror, or such women as Yaslis. You, too, are dispossessed. Do I read you wrong?—or is it not that when you were children you wondered more upon the nighted stars and less upon the occupations of your households? Did you not feel within your hearts and spirits the subdued flame of old things—visions of the early earth which were nightmares? or shapes in the darkness which your teachers and books taught you to scoff?"

"I hate mankind because I am an unhuman. I mistrust the human folk and I know the things which they do not. But you two—now you are defenseless against them, renegades, now. But you might join them yet. You might doff your memories and quell your passions and dive into the mobs, and slay and rend with them, kill on nights and love brutally, and meander this way and that before the lurking storm—

"The storm is upon the southern horizon. Men know it; even the blindest of souls out there feels in his bosom the threat of his own extinction, the extinction of his memory and his dreams, of his race. Not merely death stalks them, not merely mundane death, but—that which is so ancient and so shadowed that even human death is weak against it. Men were not always men; and they own nothing, not their flesh, not their dreams. The shadow of the Dawn is more ancient than men; and there are things more ancient, even, than the Dawn in which I first swam.

"They are *blind!* these fools, these humans! Look at them!" Serenthal waved his hand and visions of destruction and murder and hate exploded within the crystal globe.

Niror sat rigid, pondering silently. Yaslis, frowning, thinking, looked upon Serenthal dreadfully and ventured:

"I don't love them. Serenthal. I don't. But yet—even in the midst of this madness, I must admit that Niror and I have seen families who love one another. We've seen lovers who were not outcasts; we've known kings who were very good kings, and powerful men who were kind and generous. And children, with no rancor in them; and animals—what could be more innocent than an *animal?* Do these, too, deserve this—this ancient Dawn—?"

Serenthal leaned toward her, and there was pain in his eyes, deep emotion, which smoldered and burned as the yellow flames of his eyes glared. "And what of them?" he asked Yaslis in his low tone. "Do I hate them, too? Do I hate those who kill and murder, and who hate themselves more than their

enemies? Yaslis—I hate none of them. None of them— But I am outside them, I am not one of them. And more than can they, I can see the way things are to go, the destined way of men and gods and unhumans, demidemons— He who loves others can kill more readily than he who loves only himself. The dog can carry disease and perhaps topple an empire—are we to blame the dog for that? It is beyond the lover, beyond that diseased dog. It is merely the way of things—”

He paused. Silence, again, for a long time. The torches in the wall burned the brighter for the thick night fallen outside.

Niror fisted and unfisted his hands. “Still—what of us?”

“Things are written,” responded Serenthal. “The past I can reveal to you in this globe; the future I can chart for you on this parchment. You will see that the future is obscure, that there is a choice of many events. Any event might take place now, or later. The future is ever uncertain; but the way of things is destined, and when those events decreed take place, then we may say: It is written! But for history as it has occurred, the All-Night might already be upon us. But for history, mankind might yet reign over the lands. Yet the All-Night, now or later, would occur. The stars shift and ebb, men live and die, but the light is ever bordered by shadow, to the flesh must one day come corruption, to the dreamer one day—the end of the dream, the emptiness that was his before the dream possessed him. Like the sphere that never begins and never ends, though countless lifetimes may be filled onto its surface—so do all things return to what they were, so is every ending a beginning, and every beginning an end. It is written.”

Niror took in a deep breath. “Then we may do as we please,” he said. “We may go, or stay—any time.”

Serenthal nodded. “Out there, Niror, lie war and hatred. Here, where no human comes uninvited, you may live your lives untouched; but you must live without knowing another human. Yet I can teach you things; I can teach you wisdom and sorcery. I can teach you to live through the All-Night and suffer it—not as a doom of mankind, only—but as a right thing, a thing as right as the dawn and daylight of man’s early history. You may love here, and share a love knowing depths of existence denied to mortal lovers. You will gain things here. You are dreamers, Niror and Yaslis. You are humans, but the strain of old things runs in your spirit. And though I will outlive you, I will not hate you for your time here, I will remember you as the cosmos will remember you. You will both be that much closer to the cosmos, removed that much from the soil of human agony. You can live till you die, watch suns fire and moons turn cold, see mankind overwhelmed with exhaustion, meet the things of an earlier time reborn in the new Dawn. I offer you this, and there is no treachery in it, no deceit. Our spirits, different as they are, still hunger for one another. Someone else out there would not understand that; you, I think, understand.”

Yaslis and Niror looked one another in the eyes. There was an agreement between them. Death to an old life, a new life from

that death. A rebirth of their spirits, then.

Yaslis slipped her hand into Niror’s, and they both looked at Serenthal with anger and pride and love and determination in their eyes. “For all that they have given us,” spoke Niror, “the most of men have made us suffer for it. I have dreamed enough—and Yaslis has dreamed—to decide now. We will stay here, Serenthal, with you, come what may.”

A smile played over Serenthal’s features, gratitude and understanding and pride. He bowed to them. He said: “It is so written. . .”

The months of winter passed on, and the warriors of Captain Durres’ ranks grew ever more impatient for battle. Cartloads of women, wines and food stolen from transport galleys, could no longer satisfy them. They needed the clash of steel and the spray of blood; they were men, but they were warriors.

Durres had managed to keep their tempers in check throughout these deepest months of winter, through the colding winds, the biting rains, the fogs and chill dawns and somber dusks. There was no longer any reason to postpone the attack. Durres felt that his men would stall no longer; no new troops offered to join the swollen lines; and spring was not far off. It would be the sheerest folly to attempt pitched conflict during the thaw and flood season.

Durres decided to attack Csithuum.

And Thedir decided to take advantage of it. Long had he distrusted Durres; and he hungered for his own freedom. He hungered to embattle the traitors of the land in his own manner, and not be leashed to any other man’s command. By degrees Thedir had sown disunion amongst the warriors; and at the same time he consolidated his own plans to leave Durres’ host and move on with his own army, to attack wherever revolutionaries and the butchers of the throne had ruined families, desecrated towns, or overthrown the aristocracy. Thedir won men to him. He but awaited the right moment. Whether to move before Durres attacked Bargis, or after, or even during the conflict, the way of events would show.

Events, indeed, lent Thedir his right moment. Loose numbers of wandering rogues, frosted and soiled, meandered into Durres’ camp to report that King Restiror of Tol—hungry as ever to add Csith to his land-holdings—had roused his army and crossed the border on the far northeast. Durres fumed. Not long later exiles from that territory, marching westward, passed through and told how the monarch of sunned Tol had ripped stately Kethra to ruins and had sworn to conquer all Csith.

In the desolate twilight before dawn, one day late in winter, then, Durres passed the word among his commanders. The men donned their cold armor. Ladders of hardwood were taken from their hiding places. Caches of arms—knives and spears, bows and bolts—were uncovered and the weapons distributed. From the camouflage of the dense winter wood were pulled free the constructions of siege towers, and the soldiers hurriedly hammered these together and commenced rolling them onto the frozen plain before the capital’s walls. And mangonels

and catapults—built during the past cold months—were heaved forth. The horses were loosed and riders galloped them about; the mounts were frenzied after months of inaction, nervous and fierce.

Swiftly the lines were drawn up. And as the first of the dawn arose against Csithuum, the sentries on the walls blew on their horns and beat on their gongs to arouse Bargis and his city troops to the defense.

Durres galloped madly, shrieking orders, waving his sword. His commands were picked up by his trumpeters and blared forth. The great towers were pushed against Csithuum’s walls, and before Bargis’ troops had adequately manned the barricades, soldiers from the field screamed loudly in the frosty air and began falling from the heights. The mangonels and catapults hurled piles of fired refuse over the capital walls, into the city streets.

Bargis appeared on the western wall, howling maniacally at Durres, and frantically directing his warriors along the walls.

To little effect. Durres had already gained the advantage. His troops surrounded the city. His towers were emptying winter-wearied veterans over the barricades. His battering rams were hammering at the posterns, and ancient beam bolts strained and creaked menacingly under their measured blows. The glow of fire in Csithuum’s streets backlit the crowded men atop the heights. And shrieking corpses staggered and dropped, waved their arms uselessly and bounced numbly on the icy field, all about the city walls. Dawnlight skimmed over the frozen polished Serir, and red blood ran over snow and frost, hardened into winking clots of gems. Howls and yells echoed and carried forever in the crisp air.

And now Thedir made his move. He could not allow himself to enter Csithuum; he and his men would never leave the city. He could not allow himself to be trapped between Restiror and Durres; that was madness. Thedir rode to the rear of the lines and howled to a trumpeter. That man nodded and, above the battle din, his shrill announcement reached waiting ears.

“Men!” Thedir cried out, so that faces turned toward him. “You men who side with me! We ride—*now!*” And he raised his sword aloft and pointed it westward.

Intermittent cheers arose. Horsemen bustled awkwardly through the clean ranks of Durres’ attack. Durres noticed. Frightened, he galloped toward the rear.

“Thedir!”

They eyed one another—Durres and Thedir—through the seething fray. Durres was furious; he sat still on his horse, unsure and wrathful. Thedir grinned maliciously at him.

“Thedir!” Durres cried out savagely. “*Traitor!*”

Thedir’s men had run past him. They crowded the field beyond him, awaiting his signal. He turned toward them.

“*Thedir! Traitor!*”

But Thedir replied nothing; the cold light in his eyes was his only response. Durres knew the look well, for it was his own. Then Thedir slapped his horse and galloped for his men, howled to them and led their charge over the western fieldlands.

Behind them, the sounds of battle and Durres' mad howls of outrage gradually dimmed.

They rode until nightfall. Then Thedir gathered his men around campfires and spoke to them.

"The past is past!" Thedir yelled to them under the dark skies. "Soris is dead and Csithuum is conquered! Now's the time for warriors to lend themselves to strong leaders. You remember what things were—and you know who the murderers are who destroyed Csith! I'm not a traitor like Durres! I am an aristocrat, a man of the old blood! I intend to build an army to punish the murderers of Csith, and I intend to rebuild this nation into what it was! You soldiers broke with Durres for reasons of your own! These are *my* reasons! Are you with me? Anyone of you who won't back, who won't aid me in uniting Csith and fighting its enemies—you can ride from here now. I don't want to look at you. Aid me or fight against me!"

Not one soldier there moved or spoke against Thedir. His words rang true with them.

In nine days they had crossed the border into Kormistor, and Thedir began winning to him mercenaries and exiled swords of the old state. Further into Kormistor and he won to him mountain men and wandering bands from the hard lands to the north. As winter slipped jealously from the fields and skies, Thedir led his growing army southward and joined to him the warrior of coarse towns and villages. Spring arrived. Thedir's prestige and name flew before him. He began to head eastward. As spring warmed on and the coolness left the air, as the warmth returned, Thedir sieged Aman over the border in Csith, and won it. He slew the lord of Aman; the cowed host aligned with him; the warriors—long inactive—fell in with his host eagerly. Thedir took men to him as personal retainers and advisors, and directed men to oversee his swelling legions. Spring advanced, and Thedir headed into Souros, already a broken city. He took it as his own, quartered commanders there, and moved on. Further eastward and he took Bathra, after seven days of fierce combat. He punished Bathra for that: Thedir decimated the population and had all the army leaders tortured and crucified in the city square. And he stayed in Bathra for nearly a month, rearranging his army commanders, garnering information. But Thedir discovered little, for these people knew little and cared less for what went on in the world outside their walls. How things had gone in Csithuum since his rebellion, Thedir couldn't find out; nor could he discover how well Restiror had fulfilled his threat to conquer all of Csith.

Spring advanced into early, warming summer. Thedir turned toward Gaegosh and when he reached it, an emissary from the ruined city came out to meet with him. Thedir the war-lord, dressed in his armor and with his helmet-crown of rank on his head, sat in his tent and drank wine with the man, who told him:

"Lord Thedir, we don't have the arms or men to resist you. If you wish to take our city—it is yours. We only ask that you spare us our lives and protect us from Restiror."

Thedir listened; he asked what the man knew of Restiror.

"We've heard that he defeated King Durres after a months-long siege. Restiror now holds all the northern cities. But I think rebellion is rife within those cities, Lord Thedir. Over the past months people from Nyos and Kethra and Sipar have wandered into Gaegosh, saying that Restiror's commanders find it difficult to rule. Yet we're afraid that he might attack us soon."

Thedir mulled this over in his mind. "You think I'm strong enough to protect you from that, uh?"

The emissary shrugged a bit. "Perhaps, my lord."

"Who rules your city now, man?"

"The sister to our late lord—Lyala."

"Take me to her. Order your city gates opened and allow my troops to house themselves there. We won't harm you. I kill only when I'm threatened. I mean to speak to your mistress—"

It was so done. The army entered Gaegosh and was welcomed apprehensively, and Thedir was escorted to the city palace—still dishevelled from the waves of insurrection—and introduced into Lyala's presence.

It was dusk, outside. Lyala, the Lady of the city, sat in an upper chamber of the palace, in her brother's throne. Through open windows breathed the cool-warm breezes of summer evening. Flambeaux quivered along the frescoed walls. Lyala herself sat all still, pride in her poise. Her long dark hair fell loose upon her shoulders; her eyes drooped sleepily, like those of a watching leopard, and her full and painted lips pouted, ready to laugh or taunt or curse. She wore a rich robe of dyed scarlet, and about her throat and wrists hung pendants of colored jewels. Her breasts were bare and they moved but little, in her languor, to betray the quickening of her pulse. About her hips was slung a skirt of royal green, from which depended strings of eastern pearls, cascading over her lap, down her long legs, twinkling in the lamplight like staring eyes as she motioned or moved herself.

Lyala was a protrait. She was waiting. She was an invitation to Thedir; she was posed, and waiting for his reaction.

Thedir sensed it. To look upon Lyala, he instantly hungered inside. A winter of whores made him eager as any of his common swords to take this woman and ravish her. But he was a warlord and a born leader; experience over the years had taught him to temper the moment's ambition, to anticipate an antagonist and to side-step issues forced upon him till he could take the offensive.

Without more than a pause, then, in Lyala's direction, Thedir threw three rolled scrolls upon a table, sank into a chair and—with a company of city lords watching him keenly—poured himself some wine, sipped it, and eyed Lyala comfortably.

"We can help one another, I think," he told her straightly. "Restiror's in Csithuum, not twenty leagues distant. And his disadvantages we can take advantage of; you know that as well as I. You haven't the men or ambition to attack him; I'd only lose half my troops defeating him. But together, our forces can break him. I don't want to waste any

time, though. Let me send companies of troops north to Nyos and Kethra and Sipar—quickly, on the dawn—and they'll draw Restiror's attention. If what your man told me is correct, all those cities need is a bit of a push in the right direction. Then—" Thedir sipped his wine "—I'll attack Csithuum. With the balance unsettled, I can ruin him. I know that capital better than anyone alive. Now—are we agreed?" And he swallowed more wine.

His apparent recklessness at first had startled Lyala—but it won her over. She smiled roguishly at him. She had hard eyes, Thedir noticed. Lyala arose from her throne and walked to him; Thedir offered her a cup of wine and Lyala took it. Sipping, she eyed him over the goblet rim. She licked wine from her lips, moved her hips and pulled a knife from her belt.

"I expected you to attack me," Lyala told Thedir mellowly. "I'd've given you this, if you had—"

Thedir grinned. "Time enough for that," he answered, "when we've killed Restiror and put *me* on the throne."

Lyala laughed aloud, tilted her head back and guffawed merrily. She threw the knife away and moved closer to Thedir; then she noticed her councillors standing at the end of the room.

"Go from me," she directed them. "Leave us." And to Thedir, with a bold allusion behind it: "Come—drink more wine with me, Thedir. We'll conquer Csithuum and other cities, besides. We'll conquer as my brother never did. I've itched to have my hands on a sword. Your sword will serve well, I think."

And she lifted the wine vessel in salute as the last of her councillors closed the door behind him.

Chapter 5.

On the dawn, Thedir dispatched legions of his own troops, as well as what remained of the troops of Gaegosh, northward to the cities of Restiror's conquest. Then he waited. As the day passed he and Lyala and his close retainers planned and plotted, reviewed their tactics and swore to themselves that Csithuum would soon be theirs. Then riders returned to Gaegosh and told how things had gone. Nyos was taken. But Sipar remained adamant—despite a strong underground armed against Restiror's commanders—and so Thedir immediately sent another legion to add Sipar to his holdings. Troops from Csithuum had been sighted, doubtless riding for the cities to aid them against insurrection, and Thedir sent warriors to embattle those Tolian legions. Then from Horem came a messenger with word from the captains and soldiers exiled there: Captain Lusukos, General Mayur and their comrades and hosts had heard of Thedir's conquests, and now swore that they would aid him in capturing the throne of Csith.

Thedir had a mind to distrust them. Lyala and the councillors debated amongst themselves. None of them could guess what had transpired in Horem since the previous autumn, although the rider sent by the outcast lords admitted that Lord Safranos had died in the winter—mysteriously, he said—and he

added that power and influence in the city chambers had gravitated towards Lusukos.

That decided Thedir. He returned the rider with a message to Captain Lusukos, requesting the men to march for Csithuum with all available swords, when next he heard from Thedir.

The following day, a rider came from King Restiror. The king in Csithuum begged to meet with Lord Thedir to discuss a policy whereby both conquerors might mutually agree upon terms of coexistence.

Thedir laughed evilly.

"You don't believe him, do you?" Lyala fumed when she heard of Restiror's offer.

"Of course not. I'm not a fool." Thedir thought a moment. "We'll send word to Asamir, to Kethra, to Sipar and Nyos, to Horem and Aman. Half the quartered troops are to ride for Csithuum at once, armed for war. We can take the capital in two or three days, I'm certain of it— Soldier!" A man approached. "Tell the messenger from King Restiror that I will meet with him in three days' time."

"He'll suspect something," Lyala warned.

"It doesn't matter," smiled Thedir. "He'll see my legions with me, plain enough. He'll never outwit me. Here, soldier—"

Thedir scribbled on a parchment, then handed it over. "After you've spoken to Restiror's man, ride for Horem and give this letter to Captain Lusukos."

The soldier bowed and exited.

"What's your plan?" Lyala inquired eagerly.

Thedir laughed merrily, secretly. "There are drainage tunnels, centuries old, connecting the capital with the deep forest northwest of the walls. The king and his advisors used to keep them open, though the course of the Serir River has shifted over the years. It'd prove to be a handy escape route, they thought, were Csithuum somehow attacked and taken by outsiders. It didn't help Soris when he needed it, but they'll help *us*. Ha! Only the son of an aristocrat would know about those tunnels. Lusukos and his men can use them to enter the city while Restiror and I are playing games outside the walls. It's superb!"

He laughed and laughed. Lyala, eyes wide with admiration, drunk with the anticipation of victory, flew to Thedir and embraced him happily and kissed him all over his face.

"I'll make you Queen!" Thedir promised her, holding her tightly to him by her long hair. "Would you like that, uh? you she-witch? Damn it, do you know what this *means*? When I behead Restiror I'll own both Csith and Tol—and the throne will be held by a man of the old blood—!"

They clutched one another fiercely, and Thedir inhaled the perfume of Lyala, the scent of her like the gardens he'd known before, the gardens of his father's estate, when the world was whole.

The afternoon was warm with summer. Csithuum sat in the open sunlight. On the field beyond its walls stood two armies, facing one another. Between them, at a large table set in the waving grass, sat Restiror, lean and dark, and Thedir, armored and apparently pensive. Three retainers flanked

each of them. Restiror was speaking, now, and gesturing with his hands—arguing as persuasively and insidiously as any Tolian street beggar. The sunlight made his features appear wrinkled and exhausted. Thedir's eyes were bright, his fingers twitched with anticipation. Restiror finally finished his prattle, lay his hands on the table, eyed Thedir imperiously. Thedir watched him, but listened elsewhere. There was an abrupt sound of trumpeting from within the capital walls. It took Restiror by surprise; it was no signal of his. The muted blarings of other horns followed, and then the echoes of gongs. Restiror's features went tense and ashy. He stared at Thedir. "What is this?" Thedir watched him. "What *treachery* is this—?" Shrieks, distant and muffled, reached into the air. Thedir grinned meanly, began to get to his feet. The lines of the legions began to shuffle awkwardly. Restiror arose. "What *treachery*—!" And then Thedir yanked free his sword and leapt the table and in a moment buried his steel in Restiror's chest. Blood jumped. Restiror staggered back. Sunlight dazzled off Thedir's helmet as he jerked his sword free and swiftly cut again at Restiror. The king's head leaped for the ground. Bloodied, Thedir cried out savagely to his armies to attack; then he and his retainers took on Restiror's guards, as the mounted troops shifted and moved forward, the dull thunder rising, and galloped at one another, shrieking and howling. More and more screams sounded from inside Csithuum. Thedir cried out in delight and ran for his steed, mounted and waved his sword and kicked it ahead. The sunned afternoon began to overflow with tears and heightening wails and red running blood—

The mists in the crystal globe crowded over. Niror stood back from it and eyed Serenthal warily.

"So now he is king of two nations, Thedir," Niror spoke somberly. "Ever was he ambitious, ever mad for the moment, headlong and first to accuse, first to strike. So—he has come to this."

"It is written." Serenthal eyed his friend sadly. "He has forgotten you, I think—you and Yaslís."

"Aye— Just as well—" Niror sighed and rubbed a hand over his head. He had shaved his beard and moustache, shaved the hair from his head, so that he might more easily accustom himself to life with the people of shadows. And he now wore a dark robe. And his bearing, to someone outside, might seem more distant and serene, in a dark way. "Yaslís should know of this," Niror decided.

Serenthal bowed his head.

Niror went out of the room, down a corridor, took two flights of stairs. He bowed respectfully to others who passed by him; they murmured his name demurely and signed to him with their hands, and Niror returned the sign. He went down another hallway and opened a door. Yaslís was there, seated in a cushioned chair and gesturing to plants that crowded a trellis in an open balcony. She didn't turn about as Niror approached her; but when he pressed a hand to her hair, she smiled up at him.

"What are you doing?" he asked her.

"Playing with these flowers. You see—?" Yaslís repeated a gesture and crimson and

blue flowers nodded toward her, bobbed themselves in a rhythm, hued to green and yellow. "Soon, now, Serenthal says that I may exchange spirits with them—"

"Yaslís." Niror slowly took a chair beside her.

"Something troubles you, Niror."

He nodded to her. And Yaslís pressed a hand to his cheek; Niror turned his head and kissed her hand, then held it. "I must tell you something."

"Yes...?" She seemed so content and happy.

"Yaslís— It concerns Thedir. . ."

Her brows raised a little. "Yes?"

"He's a warrior, now—a conqueror. I just saw things in Serenthal's globe. Thedir's killed King Restiror of Tol, and he's re-captured Csithuum. He's king, now, of Csith and Tol."

Yaslís turned thoughtful. "He's forgotten us by this time, I'm sure, Niror."

"Aye—"

She looked him in the eyes. "I never loved him much. Niror, did you know that? You two were true friends, I know. But Thedir was too much like my father, like all the nobles—a man for himself only. There was no beauty in him. If Thedir's made himself a king—well, then, he is a king. It means little to me."

Niror sighed.

"And it should mean little to *both* of us, Niror, here, in this place. Niror— I'm content here. I can live easily here. I've felt myself opening up, being my true self, here. I love you for that, Niror."

He took her hands, pressed them tightly.

"I love you, Niror. These things of sorcery—What are they, really, but what we've both felt for so long? Niror, I love you, I *trust* you, I *know* you, Niror. I knew your mood when you entered this room; the plants and flowers knew it. You are part of me, Niror. I think—I think that you still fury against the outside too much. I don't hate them any longer—I understand it all well enough to suit me. I'm content and I love you, Niror. . ."

He gasped; his spirit fired up inside him. What could he tell her that she didn't know already? What could Niror reveal to Yaslís that was not already old knowledge to her? He jumped from his chair and embraced her urgently, held her in his arms and kissed her, again and again. Any words they might have spoken were only words, unspoken; the thoughts between them flew free, and their mood and understanding bound them. Niror, holding Yaslís, seemed to feel his soul slide into hers. She was laughing gaily inside; the world inside her, far removed from other worlds, was sunned and bright and glowing with joy. He loved her and she loved him and they were complete.

Nothing else was of consequence.

Night. Warm and damp and odored with the heat of torches and the sweat and the spilled blood. Mists hung in the air, stagnant and unclean, drifting from the torched temples and the corpses set afire. The corpses were everywhere: out on the scarred plains, clogged atop the high walls, jammed in gates and doorways, in fountains, in alleys. And wails carried through the city, wails and moans and intermittent shrieks, like sounds

from a sepulcher at a time of evil. The high round moon, silver and bright, burned down through the sweeping gossamer clouds. And Thedir stood in his armor all bloody and clogged with stinking gore, his fists dried with layers of tight crimson, his beard and hair matted with the filth of battle—he stood at an open window in the city palace and looked out upon the slaughtered avenues and boulevards of Csithuum, and revelled in the destruction he had wrought.

Out there, somewhere, burned or bloodied or clotted with fresh bodies, were the old memories he'd held. Now they rested before him on this night and Thedir could see that they were dead, his memories. His father was out there, beheaded and mutilated. And his sister, raped and torn in half with pikes running red. And his friends—Niror the scholar and the drunkards and the soldiers—all of them with legs hacked off, raw glistening bone protruding from their chests, their heads crushed in and made featureless.

Thedir revelled in it—

The shrieks in the sweltering night were the echoes of his memories, and they would pass on like the mists, and be forgotten.

Here was a bloody new dawn of an age for a summer's night. And it was his, it was Thedir's—

He sighed heartily and turned. In the chamber with him stood his men-of-arms, those who lived. Lusukos was there. Mayur was there. And the men Thedir had sent to attack the northern cities. And other soldiers, hangers-on. And Lyala, who stood a short distance from him, respectful in her turn.

Thedir sighted a giant of a man, his armor all tattered and torn, his flesh blistered with open wounds, caked with dried cruor. He called the man to him.

"What's your name?"

"Askelos." The giant's voice rumbled heavily.

Thedir grinned madly, a light in his eyes. "Will you be my right-hand man, Askelos, for gold and the glory of it?"

"Aye—" His massive fingers twitched at their sides.

"For gold then, Askelos—" Thedir eyed Lusukos. "Slay this man."

Lusukos gasped. The others stared at Thedir, sure that they'd misunderstood him. Even Askelos eyed him warily.

"Slay him, Askelos," Thedir commanded, staring at Captain Lusukos as if Lusukos should know the reason for it.

Askelos drew his blade and moved.

Lusukos stumbled backward, pulled his sword and cried out: "Why? Thedir! *Why?*—?"

Askelos beat his sword back. Startled, Lusukos was no fit adversary. He howled like a beaten child as Askelos' blade shoved through him, and he whined piteously as he sank to the flags and tried to curl up, but froze instead.

Thedir eyed Mayur. The general shrank from him, cast a hurried fearful glance at Askelos, who moved for him.

"*Thedir!*" Mayur drew his blade, made a wide swipe at Askelos and jumped from him, ran at Thedir.

Thedir laughed at him. Lyala half-leaped in Mayur's direction; but Thedir lunged and knocked away the general's sword. Mayur

swung, dived aside on instinct, howled angrily and moved at Thedir. Men behind him shouted in agony. Mayur hissed through his teeth; Askelos' steel shoved toughly out from his chest, withdrew. Steel clattered on stone and Mayur pivoted drunkenly, reached for his red tunic, fell forward on his face and groaned.

Askelos, looking dour, slowly approached Thedir as if awaiting further command. But Thedir faced his audience silently, glaring at them fiercely. No one said a word to him.

"Because I did not *trust* them!" Thedir growled; and then again he grinned mockingly. "Lyala!"

She came to him. She had a naked sword in her hand and it was covered with dry scarlet. Thedir threw an arm about her and kissed her hair, bit it and grunted. Again he looked to his shocked warriors, and curtly ordered them to leave the chamber.

"I will crown me tomorrow," he announced. "King of Csith and Tol! —Askelos, guard the door to my chambers. . ."

Holding onto Lyala, Thedir turned from them, went out of the room and down a hallway to the royal bed-chamber. Askelos followed and locked the doors behind them, then stood with his back to them and crossed his huge arms on his chest.

Thedir ravished Lyala. He stripped her brutally and she laughed at him gaily for it. He took her to the bed and pummeled her there, bit into her and kneaded her flesh so that she winced and yelped and moaned. He buried himself in her sweating flesh and fell asleep atop her, face in her hair. He slept for a while. When he awoke, Lyala was apart from him in the bed and she smelt of wine. Thedir imagined that she'd arisen sometime in the night to drink wine.

His brain yet boiled from the slaughter. The events of the day crowded in his mind and leapt over one another, confused one another, traded places. Only stark images were clear, images of steel and blood, wild passions and the fury that had gripped Thedir and would not let loose. Thrown into a desperate position, he'd acted almost as if moved by forces greater than himself. Almost as if by his wish, it seemed now, men had joined to him, and cities had fallen to him. Thedir's sword always knew where to strike, and he always knew when to move. It was his Destiny. He tried to remember how quickly it all had taken place— Half a year, only. A year ago his life had been as it always had been. And now. . .

Now he couldn't trust anyone; Thedir knew that. A king makes enemies without knowing it. Thedir realized that he must anticipate events as he'd never done before; he must act before the future resolved itself and so harm him. He lay there, in the damp and smelly darkness before the dawn, the odor of blood on him, the scents of Lyala, the feel of blood. Perhaps if Thedir never washed clean the blood, the fury and ecstasy of the moment would never leave him—

Lusukos had been a threat, as had Mayur. No more. Durres was killed, and Restiror. What others in his camp—? He must keep a lookout, Thedir warned himself, for men who appeared too prideful or too fawning or too belligerent. Trust no one. Use a man un-

til his usefulness is done, then disown him, slay him. Experience had taught him well, and his own mind would stand him in good stead.

Lyala—

She slept beside him, raw and weaponless. She was too headstrong, Lyala, thought Thedir. She acted like a man, she wished to conquer like a man. One day she might turn against him. Not yet, but some day. Thedir's eyes fell upon her, drifted over to his sword which lay on the floor beside the bed, in his pile of clothes. Lyala slept. Thedir arose carefully from the bed, stood on the cold floorstones and reached for the sword. The grip of it in his hand steadied him. Early light, obscure and hazy, drifted in through a crack in the window shutters. He could hear Lyala's sonorous breathing. What might she be dreaming of? Thedir walked about the bed, the anticipation goading him and thrilling him. Slaying a man on the battlefield offered no such suspense as this; it invigorated Thedir. He thought of toying with it, this feeling—of perhaps pouring himself a cup of wine and sitting down and staring at Lyala all the while, sipping more and more noisily, as if daring her to awaken before he drove the sword into her face—

Thedir was above her now. His shadow slid and crept over the bed and over Lyala's prone body. Her flesh was gray and the contours of her body looked like a soft meadowland or plain seen from a mountain top—the pool of her navel, the hillocks of her breasts, the small indentations of light and shadow upon her, like the breathing mother earth as she slumbered peacefully. Of what was she dreaming? Lyala swallowed in her sleep. Thedir for a moment confused himself. He loved her. But he couldn't trust her, not much longer. Kill her now or later, Thedir told himself.

He crouched over her, blew softly upon her face. Still asleep, Lyala smiled dreamily; she pursed her lips for a silly kiss. She murmured in her throat; from somewhere in her dreamland she was returning, quickly and more quickly. She would open her eyes in a moment and dreamland would halt and then vanish and gray real dawnlight and the shadowed bed-chamber would force her awake—

Thedir brought down the sword and blood guzzled up hotly, and Lyala choked and gasped and tried to breathe and scream, her eyes opened wide and Thedir supposed she saw him, knew who he was; her legs and arms writhed, her teeth clamped, she thrashed strongly then weakly on the bed and Thedir pushed down on the sword, he could feel the mild resistance of her body, her flesh, the steel scraping against bone; Lyala screamed piteously, achingly, as Thedir pinned her to the cushions and old straw and blankets, now running and slopping with slick crimson. . .

The months passed. The passion that had gripped King Thedir left him. He spent long days and evenings planning the reconstruction of Csithuum and the other cities of his nation ruined in the tempest. He created detailed plans for winning to him the roving bands of mercenaries and intransigents. He made a visit to Lors, the capital of Tol, and

announced to the populace that their nation was now his nation, and he their Lord King. Thedir expected compliancy with his policies.

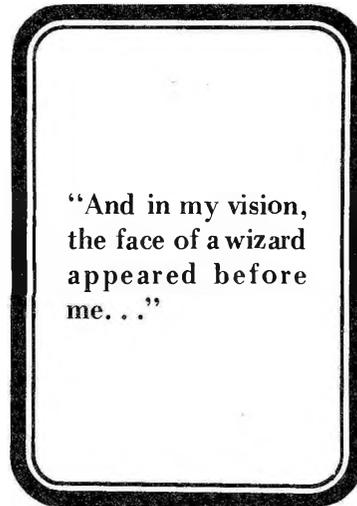
He bitterly regretted his murder of Lyala. It tormented him and he hated himself for it; but Thedir took great comfort in the rationalizing counsel of an old man he'd met in Kethra. This man's name was Fothuris and, as Thedir travelled about, Fothuris travelled with him. He consoled Thedir with his musings on the lessons of life and the Why and Wherefore of things. Thedir gradually came to trust Fothuris; the elder claimed to be a sage. Fothuris explained to King Thedir that he'd been right in slaying Lyala. Certainly it was regrettable, for Thedir had loved the woman; no doubt his tensions had prevailed more upon Thedir than common sense. But nonetheless, Fothuris had declared—by his use of magical powders and spilt wines—that Lyala surely would have harmed Thedir in the near future, had not he or someone else murdered her and ended her influence. This thought helped to lessen Thedir's grief and guilt, and it raised his estimation of Fothuris appreciably. He paid the man from his own purse and kept him by him always. The sage often dressed better than the king; and Thedir's retainers sometimes mollified their Council arguments to their king, when Fothuris sat with them, knowing how well Thedir relied upon the sage's advice.

From Lors in Tol Thedir headed his army northward into Setom, and he spent the last of the summer and the early autumn warring there against itinerant bandit tribes and the few remaining fortified cities. One by one he yoked them and named them as his own. He would have marched deeper into Setom, taken the old capital at Kastakuk, as well, but for a dire warning of Fothuris'. That man had sighted some peril in the night stars, and he advised King Thedir to remain in southern Setom for a month or two. To advance would be to tempt the Fates unnecessarily, and Thedir heeded the word.

He maintained contact with the lords of his many cities, and was pleased to learn how well progress was continuing. People were settling again into routines; production and trade and commerce were re-establishing themselves. For the first time in many months it was reported that freight galleys had appeared on the River Serir with goods from ports in Miskor, Samdum and Ishdaris. Gold and silver were pouring into the royal treasury at Csithuum, and jars of oils and wines, bolts of cloth, parchment and inks and dyes, fruits and animals and ivory and gemstones, finely-worked art crafts, strong slaves—all the trade goods from all the remaining civilized lands. Thedir relaxed in comfort at his camp in a fortress-city in southern Setom. With skalds to sing for him, wine at hand, native women for his hareems, and warriors to bolster his notions of conquest and victory, King Thedir spent the months of autumn content and confined and well-pleasured.

But again winter's season approached. In the citadel of sorcery in the desert sands, Niror and Yaslis delved more and more deeply into the intricate arcane secrets of the ancient Dawn. They studied books of old teachings—

lore older than Taisakul's time, older than humankind—and they saw how the spiral of ages swept on from Time's early terrestrial mist out into the darkness of the infinite cosmos. Man and his lands were but a minor point of interest, on this massive spiral. Niror and Yaslis memorized ancient languages, deciphered old documents written by unhumans of the early earth. They were taught, by Serenthal and others, how to read the stars in night's sky, how to investigate the mysteries of portents. They learned methods whereby they might sink their spirits within themselves and explore the shadowed and numinous caverns of their inner consciousness, and how to send their personal spirits forth from the flesh, and transplant those spirits of theirs into the multiformed creatures of life, here and elsewhere. They sank their minds down into the abysses of Hell, raised their sights beyond the vaults of Heaven. They saw again in crystal globes and polished mirrors how it was when the dark beings came onto the earth, how they roamed at will, how the early gods had embattled



"And in my vision,
the face of a wizard
appeared before
me. . ."

them and broken their rule, how Fate had decreed wordlessly and soundlessly that, in time, the All-Night of before creation should come about again, and the darkness of the first Dawn cover the lands again. Niror and Yaslis lifted the spirits of the dead and undead things of the past and communicated with them. They journeyed bodilessly into the Past and spoke with the gods, when the gods had lived in everything. They witnessed dissolution and decay, saw new brightnesses and new life brought forth from death, so that everything was in ceaseless change and transport. They saw the essential beauty in all things—in the mundane prettiness of men's accomplishments, in earthly Nature, in the secrets of the cosmos, in the inexorable sweep and stretch of gulfed universes all unending. They learned how a flower holds within it cosmoses as fruitful as the cosmos beyond the hills of earth, and not one but many cosmoses, as many as stars in the sky, and more.

And they shared a shadowed love, dark and forever and equal, and deeply passionate because their moments together made it so.

Their love transcended the clay of flesh and the spirit of the flesh, passed on through the existences of their many spirits—for their knowledge made their love a cosmic thing.

Understanding and knowing—knowing more than any mortals of their day, and as well the excruciating limits of even the mightiest of sorcerous and transmudane thought and perception—understanding all this, Niror and Yaslis felt a great compassion grow in their hearts. The petty destinies of men and their cities and wants and needs, the important concerns of their age, and of ages past, imbued the two with insight and wisdom. It was a chilling insight that they suffered and it burdened them; yet it was patient and precious, as well.

One night in autumn Niror sat and peered into a silver mirror, an instrument which answered the commands of his mind and temper. Through this mirror, Niror witnessed the accomplishments of King Thedir—and he seemed to guess the passions which drove the king onward. And Niror knew as well of the future portents decreed against men. The ancient shadow loomed all about Csith and its King Thedir; and Niror did not wish Thedir to bring about his own ruin, or be the tool to invite the All-Night upon his age. So Niror, looking into the silver mirror and witnessing the unctious and overweening Fothuris eager to please his master, decided upon a thing.

"Let this false sage dream an evil dream," commanded Niror. "Let him dream of doom and chaos, the ruination of himself and his king and his king's empire, if Thedir forces his legions southward over the sands. Let Fothuris dream this dream."

And speedily as his thought, his command hurried northward into Setom. Niror watched in his mirror. He saw Fothuris start upright in his bed, light an oil lamp and shiver in its glow. He saw the aged seer hurry from his chamber and visit King Thedir, where he told him of his evil dream.

"The face of a wizard appeared before me," Fothuris nervously related to Thedir. "It decreed that I warn you against warring in the southern lands."

Thedir was groggy and irritable and displeased. "Where else might I make war?" he demanded of Fothuris. "You warned me before not to move upon the north. Is this the limit of my empire? Am I so soon to set aside my sword and buckler?"

"The shadow of sorcery is upon the lands!" whined Fothuris. "I've read things and I know things, King Thedir! Be content with your gains, they are the last any king may own! The gods are dead and men are doomed! Never, I swear to you, have I dreamed a vision as real as this one tonight! I swear you. . .!"

Thedir reached for some wine. He was silent and his pitted eyes reflected the thoughts of his brain. "I, too, once had a dream," he confided to Fothuris. "It was many months ago. It was the night I slew Lyala, that I had my dream." He spoke slowly, piercing Fothuris with his cold stare and his tone.

"My king—"

"My dream warned me to beware of those near to my throne. It warned me not to trust overmuch any man who promised me more than it was in his power to deliver—"

"My king!" Old Fothuris was sweating.

his hands were shivering, he was looking about tensely and unsurely.

"It warned me, Fothuris—this dream of mine—" (Thedir set aside his wine) "—that many people will tell a king Yes when they mean No, merely to stay within a king's favor."

"King Thedir. . ."

Thedir grabbed for the knife in his belt and rose at Fothuris. Fothuris shrieked, fell back and stumbled. Thedir angrily stabbed him again and again, the blood flying up into his face, spattering from his driving blade. He was grunting and sweating. When Fothuris lay mangled and stained, Thedir threw the knife from him and stood, breathing and staring down at the corpse.

"What of my dream, Fothuris?" he asked the mage's corpse. "Was it a true dream? Did it lie to me, as your dreams did—?"

Wearily Thedir collapsed on his bed and stared painfully at the ceiling of the room.

Niror passed his hand before the silver mirror; it misted over and stole Thedir from sight. Niror sat a long while before the mirror, the images of it in his mind. He could guess Thedir's course. Strong men are often like children; they will disobey merely to disobey, and damn the consequences. Few men could see beyond their own imaginations, and no one—least of all Thedir, with his severe warrior's mind—could know what the shadow was that covered the northern lands and southern lands, or believe in it—

"Fool!" Niror spat, and arose and walked to a window, stood there with his arms behind him and watched the stars, and wondered and worried through the night.

Chapter 6.

Thedir removed his army southward, headed for Csithuum and there discussed with his men of arms his intention to campaign against the southlands.

"But we don't know what's there!" protested his commanders. "Those cities went silent generations ago. War, plague, famine—sorcery—!"

"Then we make war against sorcery!" Thedir proclaimed harshly. "Why should I cease my conquests when I can own half the slave-nations and the gold-nations and the ivory-nations? The desert lies between them and us. We can cross the desert in winter!"

One of his men, Olev, an old general from Lors, spoke pleadingly with the king. "In my day," he said, "I witnessed the fall of Setom. I did not see it with my own eyes. But I saw the hordes of people filing from over the horizon, moving through Tol, going on to other cities and other nations. They told of what had occurred. Aye, war and plague and pillage—and the dark things. You are a warrior, King Thedir. I was trained in my youth at the schools, and I've spent time with learned minds. Myths are not lies; truth is in them. I've known enough to realize how very little I do, indeed, know. The myths tell of an age when the dark things of old will return to steal the cities and nations from prince and merchant, and never more yield them up to warrior and horseman. My grandfather's sire told me these things, and he was respected in the court of King Silemis."

"Just what are you telling me?" Thedir asked him. "Olev, are you advising me or threatening me?"

"I am old, King Thedir, and I've learned to mark boundaries on my life. That you are yet young and volatile and powerful, I know. But you should recognize such boundaries as there are. The dreams you have suffered are warnings to you. I am telling you, O my king, that there is more to life and more to mankind than sword and wine and woman and horse, that shadows lurk in daylight, that night comes at the finish of day, that the moon is sister to the sun. I am begging you, King Thedir, not to imperil this court or your kingdom. To wage war into the southlands, where lies we know not what, would be to force against ancient things, I fear. I do not wish this. Rather would I even die by my own hand, O King Thedir, than move against the shadows of sorcery."

And Olev bowed his head.

Thedir rose proudly. His men of arms and counsel eyed him. Wordlessly the king drew his knife from his girdle and slid it across the table toward Olev. Then he stalked from the chamber and called his men after him. One by one they filed out, leaving Olev alone, leaving him to his decision—

And on the morrow's dawn Thedir led his legions out the southern gates of Csithuum and marched them down toward the flat plainfields and waiting wastes of desertland.

Niror and Yaslis and Serenthal sat that night in a chamber and pondered these events.

"Perhaps he assumes he's the Na-Kha—?" wondered Niror aloud; and then, suddenly angry and smashing a fist on the table: "Ancient gods! but what a fool! Is he mad? Or does his pride spur him on? Does he wish to condemn his host and people—?"

Yaslis merely sighed. She was a woman, and versed in ancient things besides; she seemed to understand more than was necessary. Serenthal merely sat, looking upon Niror with compassion in his gaze, and curiosity.

"I yet remember him," spoke Niror, partly to himself. "I would not like it, Serenthal, if Thedir were to be the man to move against the hosts of Dawn—if he were to be the man to wreck what remains of mankind. Not this man whom I knew so well—"

He looked at Yaslis. Serenely, almost, she sat there; if she were as concerned for Thedir as Niror was, she made no show of it.

"Let me go to him," Niror decided. "Let me speak with him and dissuade him from this. He doesn't know what he's doing—he doesn't know that he wars against mist and noise and silence and shadows, not—not swords and—men—"

"Go to him, then," Serenthal bade Niror.

Yaslis turned to Niror. "And I will go with you. That Thedir is my brother is almost of no consequence, it strikes me. But—I understand you, Niror. We will both live to see the darkness of the dawn—but you don't wish it to visit us in this way, do you?"

"I don't," he admitted. "For all my understanding of things—" Niror eyed Serenthal "—still—still—if I can prevent this, I would. Better a stranger bring down the doom, than the man I have known since childhood."

Niror sighed heavily and left the room.

Serenthal looked to Yaslis.

"Yet is he a man, in the deeps of his heart," Serenthal said to her.

Yaslis smiled a trifle and nodded slowly. Then she followed after her lover.

So they left the citadel. Niror and Yaslis, on black camels that did not travel the earth at a common pace, but speeded along so that many days passed in the space of a single day. Niror and Yaslis could see the sun and moon above them in the misty gray skies, hurrying through their phases. When their mounts slowed it was dusk, and they were near the fortified city of Eru.

"Thedir is here," Niror whispered.

They approached the walls. Night was full fallen and the great moon, gibbous, shined down upon the dead fields all about. Niror and Yaslis both recited an ancient formula by which they would be veiled from men's sight, and in that way they passed through the southern gate of Eru and through its avenues, unsensed by the soldiers and citizens about them. They went into the small city palace and saw a giant guard (Askelos) standing stalwart before twin chamber doors. They breathed a word upon him and Askelos fell into a slumber, maintaining his rigid pose. They passed by him and into Thedir's chamber, found the king in a drunken sleep on his bed. The chamber sat all dark but for the silver moonlight coming through one window.

Niror approached, casting his shadow over the king's form. He passed a hand above Thedir's face.

"Awaken, Thedir—"

Instantly the king's eyes opened, and he sat up. Niror stepped back and stood silent and still beside Yaslis in the pool of moonlight spilt upon the floor.

Thedir saw them and grunted and moved for his knife.

"Stay your hand, Thedir," Niror ordered him. "Do you recognize us?"

Thedir frowned and his brow creased. Slow recognition gripped his features. "I—I—think I know the woman—*Godsss!*" he hissed, and suddenly slapped the sides of his head. "You're dead! I'm mad, I'm dreaming!"

"Thedir," spoke Yaslis softly but urgently. "We know how you intend to enter the southlands and war against the empire of the shadows. Do not. Do not, Thedir. You know me, you say? Am I not Yaslis, then? Your lost sister? And this Niror, your friend from the old times? Then heed us, Thedir, as if we were warning figures in a dream. Listen to us, and heed us, and do not take your legions into the southern shadows."

Niror said to him: "Speak not, O my friend, but listen to us and remember. We are as we appear to be. We were not slain in the uprisings. We are not spirits and we are no dreams. I am indeed Niror, though I am much changed from the days when we drank and whored together in Csithuum, as the world has much changed. I have allied myself with the ancient things, O Thedir, as has Yaslis. These are not evil shadows that spread over men, but they are the way of things. You may sit secure in your Csithuum and live out your days as a mighty conqueror. Grains and oils and women and warriors may be yours, if you return now to your capital. But if you press on—if you war against the

shadows—then you doom not only yourself, Thedir, but all of humankind. The northern lands lie under the silent night of the first Dawn; the southern regions rest beneath the same eternal cloak. Slowly, slowly, O Thedir, this shadow of the Dawn moves upon the cities of men. The gods and demons of old walk and wander the lands. No heroes will arise to fight them down, and even the gods men worshipped lie dead now, truly. This is the end for our race, but it shall not pass in a day or a year, inevitable though it may be. Men may suffer yet for many generations, for Kossuth is secure, and Ibkarai, and Surthuth, and the multi-demons at their call. They but wait. If you move against us, then you challenge the balance and the tide of the old things will rise against you, you could not stop it. If you do not, some other man will; but you may decide against it, Thedir—now. You may return to your Csithuum and live and die, unpunished, a king.

“Return to Csithuum, King Thedir. Do not bring the shadows down upon the land. Do not force them so that they turn upon you and swallow all the lands and bring eternal ruination to all the sons and daughter of men.”

Thedir sat aghast, wide-eyed and disbelieving.

“Trust to this nightmare, Thedir,” Yaslis begged him. “Now, sleep again, prince of discord, and retire on the morrow toward old Csithuum, lest your pride lead you to misery.”

She made a motion with her hand, and, as if against his will, Thedir lay back on his cushions and sank again into slumber.

And Niror and Yaslis passed from the chamber, made a sign to Askelos so that he would awaken before the dawn, and then went from the palace and the city and returned to their fortress. There, they ate on wine and bread and cheese, then peered into a crystal globe to see what Thedir had decided.

“It is written. . .” Yaslis spoke sorrowfully.

Niror threw his wine cup from him in rage.

The daylight was gone. Dawn had come in a mist and the sun did not cast its brightness through the crowded cool fog that swarmed over wasteland and wildfield. Like a dense incense the burning miasma rolled northward over the lands, unharbingered, whispering and silent like a waiting death. It flowed thick and ceaseless past Eru, onward and forward, as if of its own will.

Thedir moved at the lead of his armed host as they pushed through the sleeping mists. They rode silently. Through to mid-morn they rode, though the men couldn't tell dawn from noon in this unchanging denseness, wafting and spilling and pooling about them.

Thedir quietly cantered along, tense, his eyes fixed. He worried, however, about the dream of yesternight. Surely it had been a dream. He sought to unravel its portents in his own mind. Without a doubt, Thedir assured himself, both Niror and Yaslis were dead; he'd long ago lost word of them, given them up for dead. There was no possible way they could have survived the past year's

carnage, not as the weak aristocrats they were—

Surely it had been a dream. Aye— But symbolic of something; what—? Thedir's past warning him against pressing onward? Perhaps some hidden feeling of guilt, as heirophants taught? Perhaps he'd cloaked his past in the robes of sorcery, and the dream-visitation declared that only now would his true conquests begin, where his past and future touched, as Thedir moved from one to the other—?

His men behind him, chilled by this ragged mist, trapped by its gloom, worried and depressed, plodded on in Thedir's wake and muttered feebly amongst themselves and pressed their horses so close together in the march—so as not to lose contact with one another—that the ride was uncomfortable and irritating.

The legions marched all day, not stopping for rest or reconnaissance, eating sparsely as they rode. Though the time wore on, no sunlight reached them—always the damp deep mists swirled about their horses' hoofs, ran off before them like filaments to barricade farther stretches of direction. Some soldiers began to wonder if they'd lost their way; yet it seemed that Thedir continued ever southward.

A few times a man or two slipped from the lines, intentionally or not, and lost himself in the denseness of the far fields. And intermittently the warriors heard startled cries for aid from far off. Whether the howls sounded from their own men or from other lost wayfarers—or even if the cries were truly human—none knew for certain. Neither were the legions positive of the direction of the cries; they could have come from anywhere, there was no telling in these dank mists. Later on, however, some men heard a vibrant shriek which surely came from one of their own men; the voice called out his name and tried to give his location. A few soldiers began scouting for him, but King Thedir quickly recalled them. Trying to find anything was madness. Still the soldier—near or far, who could tell?—cried for aid. His comrades listened. The voice abruptly rose to a fearful shriek, and soldiers cursed and looked around frantically. The voice carried strangely on the whispering gray mists. The shriek, disembodied and eerie, rose and fell, then dropped short. There was a vague muffled sound from out there somewhere; and then nothing more. Soldiers lifted dry prayers to gods they'd ignored for years.

The warriors moved on, unnerved. Sweat poured down their faces; some of them removed their helmets to wipe their heads. They whispered, mumbled, cursed, grunted. Thedir—fearing mutiny—called a halt and commanded his men to break up the small dead trees that stood about and wrap them with field grass and use them for torches.

An increasing murkiness signalled evening coming on. But Thedir told his men to keep up the pace, they weren't going to rest till they'd cleared this fog. Some cursed him for it. A few warriors, anonymous in the swirling mists, asked in loud voices just where they were headed and why. Thedir answered them: he was their king and commander and they were to follow him; he knew what he

was doing; and that was the end of it.

The torches made the armed procession a dismal and foreboding one. Those torches cast fouled waves of silent light in all directions, illuming the rolling fog nearby but darkening the mists that wafted by further away. The torchlights glowed dimly on battered helmets, sprinkled along unpolished cuirasses, slipped up and down the lengths of belt metal or sword-sheathes. The unsure light revealed glimpses of sweating foreheads, dewed beards and moustaches, veined hairy arms, teeth clamped grinning. Where one man held a torch in his arms, he moved along as a gaunt silent sentinel; and farther from him his fellows shuffled on in a crowd of ghostly movement—etched figures from some frieze depicting the dead in the halls of the Underworld, with the mists of spirits about them—

Into the night the legions marched, through the dense darkness, pausing only to relight torches or bundle new ones together. Men spoke more and more determinedly of revolting against Thedir, of turning back. Only their lack of direction, and their fear of what lay in the mists beyond, held them still. Thedir would not allow rest or recuperation, so eager was he to pass through this fog. So in ones or twos a number of soldiers began slumping by the wayside, curling up and resting in the grass. Thedir ignored them. This practice stopped once those in the ranks heard, through the crouching night-field, cries carrying from those resting behind—shrieks and howls obscured somehow, carrying with an unnatural reluctance through the dying world's miasma, and then stoppered suddenly. . .

Half the night— And then Thedir, exhausted himself and aware of the anger and terror of his men, called a halt and allowed the troops to scrape away at the earth and build fires, roast food. The darkness and dense mist clung about them malevolently. Thedir sat apart with a few retainers, and they spoke in undertones of what they might find when the fog lifted—if it ever did. Thedir himself felt impulses of fear tugging at his insides. Should they turn back? He asked his retainers and they replied that it was their king's decision. Thedir groaned. Now he cursed himself for ignoring the dream of the previous night. He was fearful. Images drifted through his mind, and remembrances of what the dream-figures or ghosts of Niror and Yaslis had promised him. The end of the world—his own destruction—the shadow of sorcery hurled down upon the lands if Thedir led his army against the southlands— How could he come to grips with such things?

But, Thedir asked himself, how could his sword embattle such enemies as this fog? Was this fog the army of sorcerors and demidemons? Agony and coldness clutched the king of Csith; for a moment, Thedir would have turned back. Worries about where they were, in what direction to continue, plagued him and taunted him. He forced himself to deal with the practical matters of this dilemma, strategy and maneuvers, attempts to out-think his foes—all the trained thoughts of an army commander, not the rank fears and worries of a child in a nighted garden.

It may have been just before dawn. Thedir,

in any event, would have guessed that to be the time. His men had finished their meals, had constructed more torches for the march. The density of the fog or mist seemed to be lessening, so it may very well have been near to dawn. Though about the stilled army reigned utter silence, afar off every man now heard a thin rumbling—like the threatening of a thunderstorm, or a distant earth tremor. Like the breakers on an ocean beach, perhaps. The dim grumbling sounded, then relaxed; a moment later it commenced again, louder, closer. It grew and swelled, this thunder, until the tremors of it seemed to rock the curling mists that floated through the makeshift camp. Again the trembling quietened; then again it builded up, ever closer, and Thedir and his army now felt it under their boots, tightening and loosening underground. Horses whinnied and shied away from their masters. The mists began sifting and swirling as if gusts of wind or fierce breaths from on high sought to scatter them. The soldiers murmured discordantly, their anxiousness heightening. Those who'd been standing now sat down again on the ground. A few pressed their hands to the earth as if afraid of being jarred loose. Thedir got to his feet and pulled free his sword.

The grumbling and heaving under their feet increased; and the mists began to drift off wholly. The soldiers crept closer together. A few began yelling at Thedir, threatening mutiny. The last of the mists rolled through the camp, passed by the men ever more swiftly, moving on and on—toward the north, guessed Thedir. Now the air was clearer; you could see the warriors of the legions bunched all over the field, sitting still and staring about. Thedir remained a distance from them, sword in hand, waiting. Daylight showed far before him.

And then a great wind from heaven blew down upon the field, and the trailing wisps of fog and miasma were blown free in the space of a heartbeat. Soldiers looked behind them: there was the fog, gray and dense, covering the vast fieldlands they had spent a day and a night wandering. Before them, before Thedir, stood the stretching field; and not far ahead was the desert, all wasteland and distant sand dunes. And a dark fortress, set alone and solid on the dead earth, close to the horizon.

And beyond that, the men saw, the earth was not golden with the light of the sun, but dark and blackened, covered over with a real shadow; far above the low skimming clouds, however, they could yet discern the sun. Then, from beyond that small fortress, the vast shadow of the clouds seemed to progress toward Thedir and his host. For one moment the men made out a line of daylight between the dark fortress and the shadowed land beyond it. The shadow on the land crept northward with no apparent line of demarcation. Then the thread of daylight between it and the fortress was blotted out and the darkness—like a blanket drawn up over a rumpled bed—climbed over the fortress and splashed drily on either side of it and moved forward upon the field.

The soldiers began to panic. One screamed; then another screamed. They were slapped still. Voices called for order. Men shouted

Thedir's name.

But Thedir stood alone, looking upward. He could see the sun, golden and hazy in the high blue skies, as perfect and joyous as it had been all his life. He closed his eyes and basked in its sudden warmth. Thedir felt like a child again, before all this had come to pass. Before *he* had caused all this to come to pass—

Frightened, suddenly, by the awareness of his responsibility and his—destiny—Thedir glared at the far horizon. The shadow was crawling ever closer, soon it would sweep over them—

Memories visited Thedir—painful memories. The memories of his lifetime all suddenly burst clearly in his mind's eye. They frightened him by their enormity. He pictured them and saw them, commenting on them silently to himself—and Thedir witnessed again the stupidities of his life, the arrogance and distrust, the foolishness, the valuelessness—A hatred and impotence grew up within him. Was *this* his life? Was *this* its importance? This only? Thedir could summon his entire life, all of its worth, to him in a seeming moment: the hopes and interests and fears, joys and sorrows—all of it. And all led to this moment, this moment, standing here before the shadow of the Dawn—Thedir, recognizing himself as a fool, seeing himself dying and bringing down upon an innocent humankind the horrible guilt of his own rashness and pride and blindness—

Men behind him screamed; some scrambled, as if for safety. Thedir stared up. The warm glow of the sun was vanishing, disappearing, gone. The shadows loomed. High up, then, Thedir saw ominous storm clouds—storm clouds far higher than he had ever before seen clouds, so high up, so distant that they seemed beyond the skies. The storm clouds seemed to drift, almost imperceptibly, above him and then beyond him. Then Thedir noticed a single dark spot against those angry, incredibly distant clouds. He watched the spot, fascinated. The small blackness fragmented slowly into other dark bits so tiny and small that Thedir had to blink, or lose sight of them. But they grew larger. Each one continued fragmenting as its parent had, dropping forth countless other black bits, all tiny and wafting against the deep distance of those bunched, boiling storm clouds.

Thedir felt a cool wind blow upon him from the south. He saw the shadow approaching him, covering the earth, now half-way between him and the strange citadel in the waste. The wind blew colder and fiercer; Thedir felt it ripple through his beard and hair, felt it blowing harder against his bare arms. His sword shivered in his fist. Again he looked up, and Thedir's breath paused.

The black bits filled the sky. They were dropping at an incredibly swift speed, sweeping down and spiralling, now—all of them circling about in a wide funnel, the forefront pointed at him. Thedir groaned, turned his eyes away, stared up. The thought struck him that this was a dream; he felt partially disassociated from himself. Now he saw what the black bits were, as they fell nearer and nearer to him, as they swooped down upon the field, hurried at him and his nation-state—

They were phantoms, they were demons,

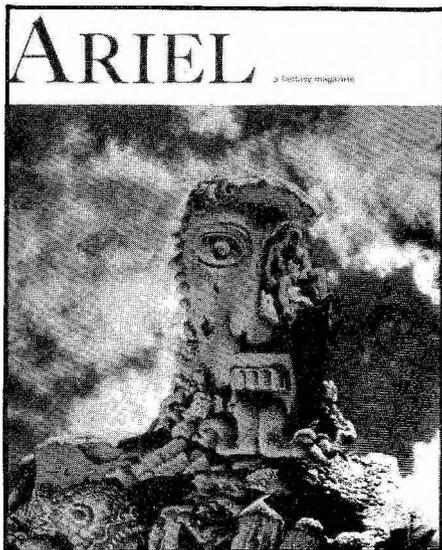
they were all the things of myth and legend—horrible creatures, winged and unwinged, serpents and hybrids, demons and anti-demons, screeching and howling and shrieking, bringing the cold winds with them, and drawing behind them the shadow of eternity.

Thedir collapsed to his knees. He threw away his sword and cried out loud in suffocating fear and agony. He was hardly aware of his legions behind him doing the same—praying and begging. The winds pushed at him more and more strongly, harshly cold, now. A last time Thedir stole a glance above him—the fierce winds threatened to blast his eyes from their sockets. But he glimpsed the black shadowed things, the vague horrible shapes—eyes and teeth, fists and wings, tails and claws and gleaming swords—as they passed over him, breathing upon him, their wings touching him, the burning eyes glaring like torches at night and the beaked and muzzled mouths laughing at him swiftly—

Then Thedir shrieked and shrieked. His memories returned to destroy him, piling agony upon agony. He remembered—he remembered everything—Hopes and ambitions and pride, the small whispered private things, all the awful things and good things, brute passions and simple sunlit reflections, dreams within dreams, and other lives. His memory cast back through the centuries he'd learned about and Thedir realized and hated himself as he realized that he had lived his life and countless others had lived theirs, the important things of their lives had been important to them, and now he had cast their lives away, and murdered his own spirit—all those lives, all those things of many lives and civilizations, all the mixed spirits of humankind pouring up from temples and battle-fields through untold ages—and all of it, now, all of it, covered up and obliterated forever by this fierce cold storming sweeping hating shadow on the wind of eternity, this tempest against mankind, against every city and every man and child and dog and every thought imagined and ever brick, every pebble overturned by a wondering child—

Thedir shrieked and shrieked, his rage and sorrow and self-hate greater than his ability to contain them. Then he felt himself gripped by the winds and pulled from the solid field-land. Thedir felt himself lifted into the air and buffeted about in the windstorm, thrown into a melee of boots and faces and swords and talons and tails and biting teeth. He felt his body being poked and devoured, felt his spirit escaping through his wounds. Then he felt himself dying, Thedir felt himself trailing along through blackness, as if he still had a body, and the blackness quickly seeped into him and bloated him and filled him up, dragged him screaming from himself into darker hot blacknesses and deeper cold shadows. . .

And at an open window in a chamber of their citadel, Niror and Yaslis stood together and held onto one another, and saw all of this and understood. Secure, saddened, they watched as the ancient foretold shadow moved upon the land and all things, as the All-Night swept up from them and away from them, and over the places of men to blacken all those things, forever. □



Ariel, @ \$5.95, published by The Morning Star Press, P. O. Box 6011, Leawood, Ks. 66206.

Ariel no. 1 is \$6 worth of disappointment and unrealized potential, leaving this reviewer wondering just exactly *what* the Morning Star Press people are trying to accomplish. The soft-back 9 X 12 book format is admittedly impressive, almost breath-taking, but it's all surface gloss and glitter with literally no substance waiting beneath the chrome-coat covers.

A regularly-scheduled magazine along the lines of *Ariel* is indeed an exciting prospect and could easily capture the support of a quality-starved fandom; more's the pity that this first issue simply doesn't fill the bill.

Essentially, the potential customers of the magazine have been shamefully led down an off-traveled path by misleading advertising. We don't really *know* what to expect when we read ads blurring color covers by Frazetta and Corben, "Den," and Hogarth's last Tarzan. I wasn't expecting reprinted material in a six buck fantasy magazine, and I seriously doubt that others did, either. In fact, the majority of *Ariel's* features are available in other easily obtainable (and in several instances, less expensive) formats. I could see the point if Editor Durwood had chosen to print material not currently available in the U. S., but his decision to reprint art that has been viewed and appreciated a hundred times over suggests an ignorance of the market he's producing for or, worse, the desire to exploit the field past the limit that it already has been.

The magazine does have several things going for it—the Frazetta interview (part 1) is interesting and is only hampered by Publisher Eisen's constant suggestions that there is some sort of kinship between F. F. and Marlon Brando: asinine is a polite description of the attempts to make such a parallel between the two. The articles appearing before and after the interview discuss Frazetta's rebellious nature and his career as a "classical illustrator," respectively; their sole purpose seems to be to elevate Frank to the stature of God. Sorry, friends, but I thought the old one was enough.

Which isn't to slight Frazetta's talent or ability; he's easily one of, if not *the*, finest

Chacal

reviews

Coming in the Future



Fiction By:

Tuttle
de Camp
Reamy
Utley
Wagner
Wellman

Art By:

Conrad
Easley
Fitzpatrick
Jankus
Steranko
Whelan

Interviews With:

Robert Bloch
James Gunn
Ramsey Campbell
Tom Reamy

Special Features

The Art of Clyde Caldwell
Behind the Tolkien Mythology



Wizards, a film by Ralph Bakshi. Released by Twentieth Century Fox.

Heroic fantasy, *real* heroic fantasy produced on the scale necessary to carry the concepts off effectively, has finally come to the silver screen. So *what* if the hero is a red-nosed animated character? Avatar the Great is far more enjoyable, entertaining *and* believable than Steve Reeves, Sabu or Kerwin Matthews *ever* could have been and the evil magician, Blackwolf, easily outshines Chris Lee or Tom Baker in film villainy.

Wizards is a full-length animated feature which combines elements of sword & sorcery, SF, and light Tolkienish fantasy. Taking place ten million years in the future, after the last nuclear holocaust, the film tells the story of two brothers, both with mystical powers—one is good, the other evil. Inevitably they're thrown into conflict with one another and the future of the world depends solely upon the winner of the final combat. Avatar, the symbol of right, is a likable enough sort—a cigar smoker and a whiskey connoisseur, who is perfectly content to let things remain the way they are, while his foul counterpart, Blackwolf, is an admirer of Hitler and his school of thought. Indeed, he even has his army of demons wear swastikas and in one memorable scene a lizardman chew happily on a carcass marked with the Star of David.

Ralph Bakshi, who should be remembered for his earlier features *Fritz the Cat* and *Heavy Traffic*, has an understanding of his subject matter and is easily forgiven for some of the moments, and moments only, in the movie that don't quite make it. Several sequences are animated over stock footage from several live-action war films and generally detract from the atmosphere established by the rest of the production. Ahh, but Bakshi's humorous touches and some of the "in"-jokes and phrases more than make up for it: the elvin hero shouts curses of "Crom!" and "Mitra!" while Avatar, at one point, spouts an incantation to ward off evil: "Morrow/krenkle/frazetta!"

All in all, *Wizards* is a thoroughly delightful excursion into the realm of fantasy and is sure to please those of us who have waited so long for s&s to make it to the screen.

Jim Kearney

fantasy illustrators working today, but reviewers, interviewers and fans alike are way off mark when they begin comparing him to Michelangelo, Reubens, Rackham or Pyle.

The Hogarth interview is truly interesting and extremely well handled. Mr. Hogarth comes off as a thoughtful, sincere craftsman and his hints of future projects are truthfully appetite whetting.

Other features include a confusing pulp article by Charles Wooley, several poems by Robert E. Howard, and an intriguing story by Paul Boles. Also included is an adventure tale involving a Puritan avenger set in the period of the Spanish Inquisition—to put it mildly, it's a poor rip-off of REH's Solomon Kane and should have been returned to the writer with a cheerful rejection slip.

All in all, *Ariel* no. 1 is but a shadow of what it could and *should* have been. There is *no* attempt to communicate with their customers and the Morning Star Press people seemingly aren't concerned with the wants and needs of the readers. Perhaps I've misinterpreted their intent—Mr. Eisen and company *might* care what we require in the way of art and features. And if that *is* the case, we should attempt to communicate with them and help them shape *Ariel* into the product that is needed presently in the field. And if they don't, then I might suggest that the Morning Star Press staff start looking at the "Want Ads," because there isn't room for those who use the genre and the fans for their pay-checks and their pay-checks only.

Joseph Kenyon-Smithe



☆ A FEVERED GLIMPSE OF CHAOS ☆ THE ART OF PHILLIPE DRUILLET

by DAVE MCFERRAN

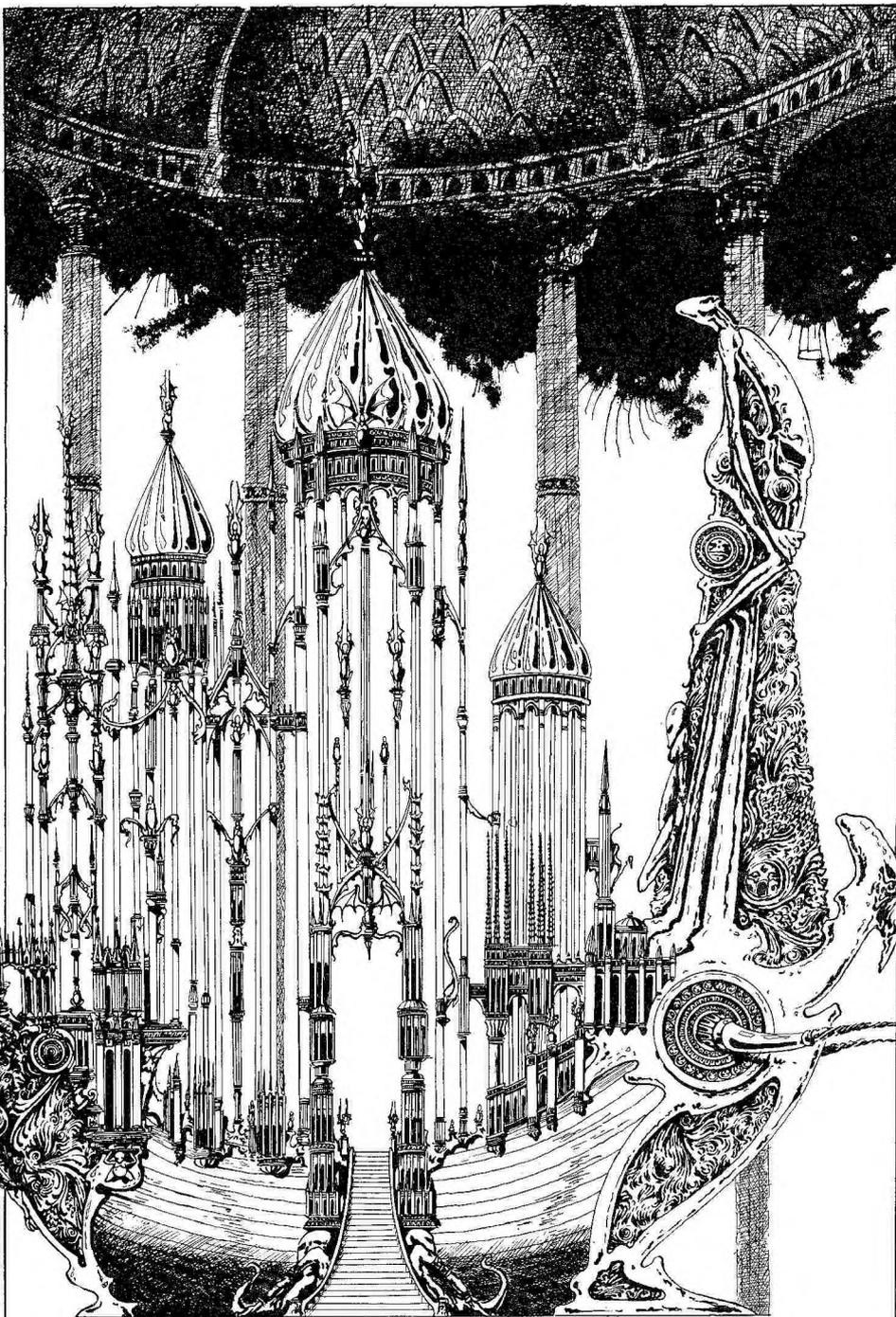
Although he's a highly respected figure within certain fantasy art circles, the French illustrator Philippe Duillet has never enjoyed the popularity that has been visited upon many of his less accomplished contemporaries. The reasons for this relative obscurity are, at first sight, fairly obvious because, for one thing, most of the text which his incredibly horrifying illustrations accompany is written in French, a language which is surely of little value or interest to the average English-speaking reader. Additionally, and equally of importance, distribution of Duillet folios in the more lucrative fantasy markets of Britain and the United States has been, up until the present time, so poor as to seem almost perfunctory. However, the real reason which has served to prevent Duillet from being an internationally-acclaimed fantasy artist has been his constant refusal to pander to aesthetics. He insists on portraying fevered worlds of the fantastic in a distinctive manner which could accurately be described as cosmically terrifying. In fact, so strongly violent are some of his illustrations that they have caused offense to quite a number of critical circles.

Not even the most loyal Duillet fan could truthfully claim that this young Frenchman's work is *tastefully* executed, because seemingly with relish he depicts nauseating scenes of horror and corruption with such intricate and overpowering detail that one is almost tempted to believe that—in some feverish glimpse of chaos—Duillet had actually *witnessed* those disturbing manifestations of an apparently warped and shattered mind.

Druillet's first small taste of success beyond the borders of his homeland came in 1973 when Unicorn Books, a small semi-professional British publishing house issued a large-sized black and white (well, purple and white!) folio of his drawings called *Elic: The Return to Melnibone*. This collection was unsatisfactory in a number of ways—it was merely a reprint of an earlier French portfolio called *Elic le Necromancien* with a tagged-on English "text" by fantasy author Michael Moorcock. I use the word "text" advisedly because Moorcock's involvement in *The Return to Melnibone* was perhaps the biggest mistake of his literary career—it was a hastily composed, inconsequential piece of writing which added nothing whatsoever to the Elic of Melnibone cycle of stories. (In fact, it's pretty certain that Moorcock's talents were only employed by Unicorn Books so that their portfolio would sell strongly on the strength of his name.) And so, it was left to Duillet's sinister, outre illustrations to save the day.

And save the day he most certainly did! Even today, after the publication of many sophisticated and full colour Duillet collec-



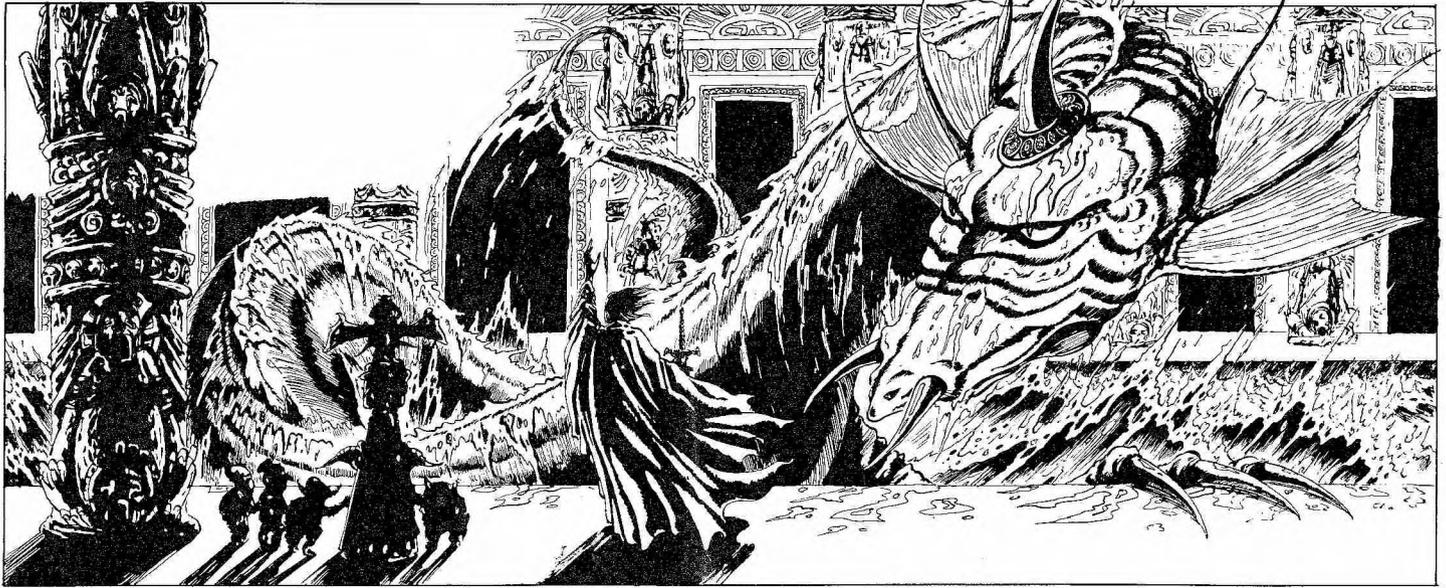


tions, the artistic contribution to *Elric: The Return to Melniboné* makes it one of the most spectacular and visually stimulating booklets ever to be produced. (Although interested parties are advised to try and track down the original *Elric le Necromancien* which remains uncluttered by the distractions of Moorcock's hurried additions.) The inadequacies of a formalised plot allowed Druillet unlimited scope and opportunity to endlessly develop his own highly imaginative conception of the crazed, gargantuan architecture of the Dreaming City of Imrryr, the hideously depraved scenes of licentious savagery and corruption in the teeming courts of the usurper Yyrkoon; and the last dying splendour of the once world-ranging Island Empire of Melniboné.

Prior to buying a copy of *The Return to Melniboné* (my first introduction to the work of Druillet), I had been accustomed to the hackneyed "barbarian slays dragon," "barbarian rescues maiden" or "blades locked, they struggled for advantage"-type of fantasy illustration, but here was something entirely different indeed!—illustrations which veritably reek with the brooding malignance of delirium-filled nightmares, wrung from the darkest corners of the soul. To be confronted with a Druillet painting for the first time can be a shattering experience indeed and one that you're not likely to forget for a long, long time.

For the thing is that Druillet's style is staggering. He paints flamboyantly, with what initially appears to be an elaborate, angry recklessness. However, when one considers the painstaking, intricate detail which features prominently in his work, it soon becomes apparent that carelessness is definitely not one of his vices. Perhaps more than any living artist, Druillet has flung his soul into his work, actively charging it with a fierce, strong-willed *tempramental animation* which literally bursts upon the senses. His sinister landscapes may be jarringly garish or moodily, eerily sombre but they all seem to actually live and breathe, to exert a malignant force upon the cowed, ghost-haunted creatures who live beneath their leering shadow. His cities are *truly* cyclopean, their weird, insane architecture fashioned from proportions so inhumanly colossal as to batter the intellect into submission with their evil, demented beauty.

And Druillet's characters themselves—not even the most mundane or innocuous looking is like anything you've ever seen before. They are mutated, misshapen creatures whose thoughts and actions are as outlandish as their appearance. I'd go so far as to say that if old H. P. Lovecraft himself had ever imagined anything so extraordinarily nightmarish, he'd have changed his pants with alacrity, given up horror-writing and settled down to some relatively harmless pastime like bear-wrestling or Russian Roulette. For Druillet's bad guys—and, in some cases, even his good guys—have no redeeming features whatsoever. At the very least they are disfigured or horribly tattooed psychopaths and at worst, they can be bloated, insane beasts who copulate horribly with rotting corpses whilst their comrades, fevered by the wild dancing of naked, painted figures, feast upon dead,



mutilated children in the gore-filled halls of Hell. Their mindless cries of hate echo across a million worlds, ravaged by the half-wild armies whose cruelty plunges the universe once more into Chaos.

And Chaos is the key-word you must bear in mind when you try to form an understanding of the Druillet psyche because, when it comes to portraying the mind-wrenching, maddening, kaleidoscopic distortion of physical law that is Chaos, he has no equal in terms of scale, content, forcefulness or impending drama. But it's pointless in a short appreciation like this to try and analyse the true meaning of Druillet's work, because his complex and often baffling illustrations could quite easily prove to be a worthy subject for an erudite volume of psychological study. (Dirk Mosig, take note!) However, a number of correspondents have, in various personal letters, brought up the subject of Druillet's internal stability and the general consensus of opinions seems to be that by virtue of the abjectly *alien* viewpoint which dominates his work, he is certainly not sane in the general sense of the word. I personally wouldn't go so far as to say that he is the victim of some

abnormal psychosis, but clearly—from the frenetic violence and depravity inherent in his creations—I must indeed concede that he is driven by something which—for want of a more suitable term—I prefer to describe as “creative madness.” Such a condition is, naturally, far removed from any dangerous mental aberration and it's worth noting that other men of pronounced creative genius—Edgar Allan Poe, Clark Ashton Smith and H. P. Lovecraft, to name but three—similarly exhibited more than casual signs of domination by some black inner vision. It may well be that such is a prerequisite of genius, rather than merely a symptom.

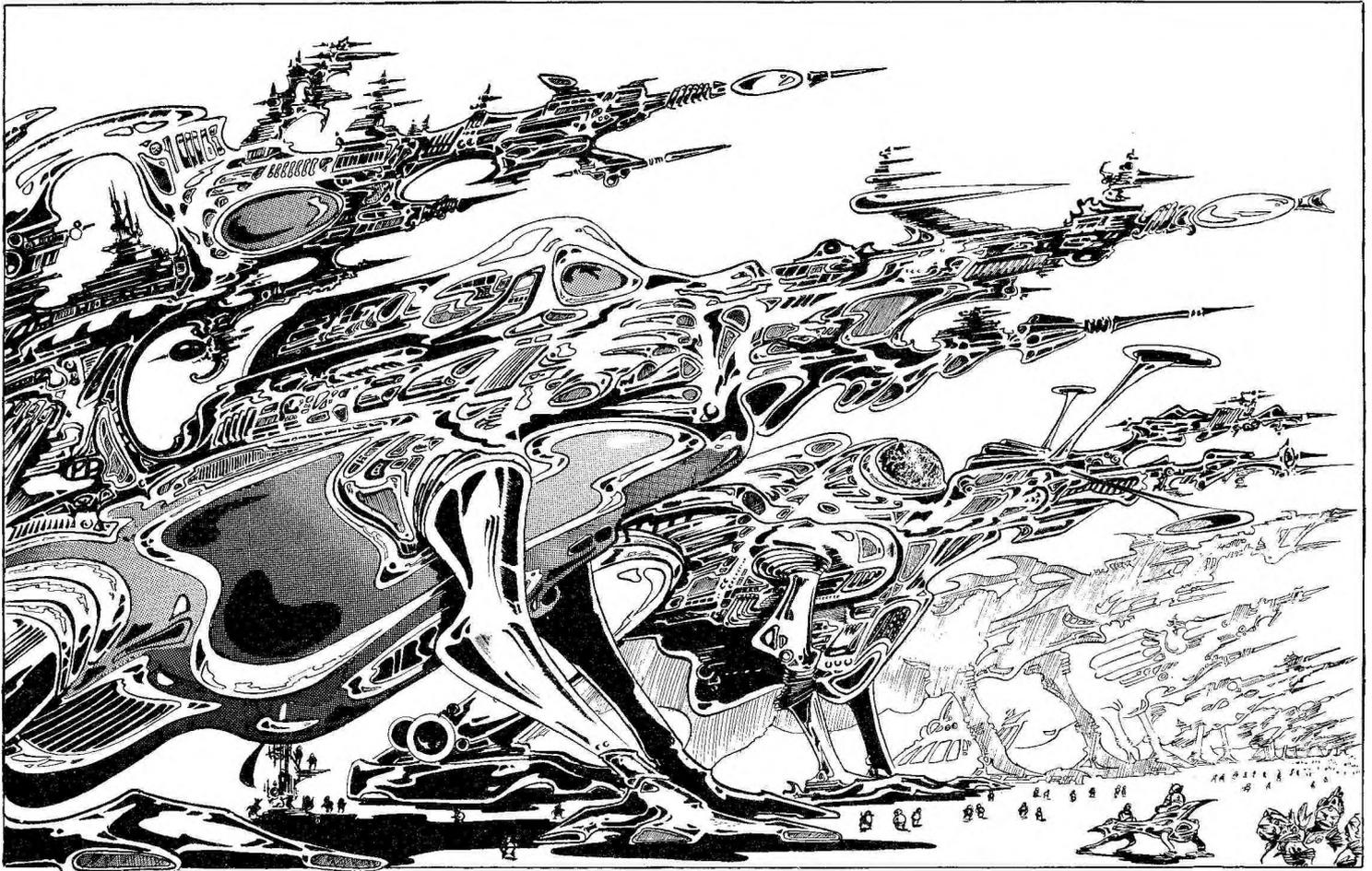
And so, predictably, as in the case of all powerful creative intellects, Druillet has drawn inspiration from his own inner conflicts and in doing so has pushed his already distinctive artwork even further away from the hackneyed fantasy illustrations which proliferated at the time. If the *Etric: The Return to Melniboné* portfolio heralded a move towards a new, freer form of graphic illustration, then its more professionally inclined successors, the full coloured, hardbound volumes like *Les 6 Voyages De Lone Sloane*,

Delirius, *Yragael* and *Urm, le Fou* were an even firmer avowal of Druillet's fervent desire to explore frenzied new worlds of the weird and fantastic.

Although some knowledgeable critics raved over the volumes *Lone Sloane* and *Delirius*, which were indeed milestones of fantasy art, they failed slightly, I think, because the basically SF-oriented presentation employed (particularly in *Delirius*) severely restricted Druillet's imagination to a state whereby, in order to project his feelings, he was forced in the main to resort to tactics which rather than being impressive, merely induced a feeling of *deja-vu* to the reader. His teeming visions of a claustrophobic, technological hell tend to become boring and his interspersed scenes of cosmic horror were but a pale shadow of an aggressive, sprawling terror which so bloodily coloured the pages of the later collections like *Yragael* and *Urm, le Fou*.

Yragael is quite the finest production to have ever come from the pen of Druillet. For the first time, the accompanying text provided an admirable complementation to the awe-inspiring illustrations in the volume. It is richly imaginative, written in an archaic, yet





—one might say—mystically psychedelic style. Just listen to the power of the opening lines:

"Picture the oceanic sphere that is the viscous universe.

A voracious tendril exudes from the black-blooded serpent, to polish lightning across a malignant field of ink, spiralled with clear waves of lymph.

Picture this eye of light bursting from eyelashes of hydrogen. The sweating of suns upon a melting iris.

The Dance of the Goat. The flight of Lucibel. And Dis, risen up upon a million reddened worlds. And Belial, obscured in the mists of Cygnus. And the pandemonium within the cellular abyss.

And the serpents. The sirens from the orbs of cinders. The Gorgon of Helium and the metamorphic song of the angels to the volcanoes. Mammon and Leviathan. The sylphs and the Salamander. Ages. Slime. Ashes. The Tree of Life in a forest of swords. Acheron and Pyrphlegeton. The spreading pool of flame from the satellites of Moloch.

PICTURE TIME!"

Frightening, image-packed writing indeed, and an able partner to the artwork it accompanied. And from these obscure and metaphysical beginnings we are treated—both in *Yragael* and the follow-up collection of *Urm, le Fou*—to an atmospheric saga of bloodshed, distorted conditions of reality and moody, romantic loneliness. Both *Yragael* and his son, the madman *Urm*, are rejected, friendless, remote creatures who eventually perish as a result of the fiendish desires which rule

them. It's quite amazing how, by facial expression and sombreness of surroundings, Druillet can conjure deep emotions of intense sympathy within his readers for the poor, ravaged *Urm*, who wanders the night-shrouded deserts crying curses to the gods who damned him with ugliness. I've seldom been struck by such an accurate assessment and sensitive interpretation of the inconsolable pain of loneliness.

But Druillet is not just concerned with the darker side of human nature. His ribald collection of comic strips called *Vuzz* shows his proficiency of portraying lewd humour in a staunchly irreverent manner.

Vuzz himself is a roguish, wandering swordsman reminiscent of Vance's *Cugel the Clever*. He wanders around stark, dying lands with no apparent purpose, stumbling into a series of uproarious predicaments. The most blatantly hilarious episode in the collection occurs when he is befriended by a wizard who soon proves to be homosexual. *Vuzz* eventually tires of the wizard's amorous advances and, whilst being felled by the mage, draws his broadsword and decapitates the fellow! Unfortunately for *Vuzz*, the wizard's ghost follows him wherever he goes and, when our hero is confronted with peril, appears to him, promising rescue if only he will give "just one little kiss."

Superficially *Vuzz* may appear to be the stereotype of the classic, lovable roguish buffoon but in his own way he is beset with as much tragedy as *Yragael* or *Urm*, the main difference being that he takes a more philosophical and optimistic viewpoint of his own

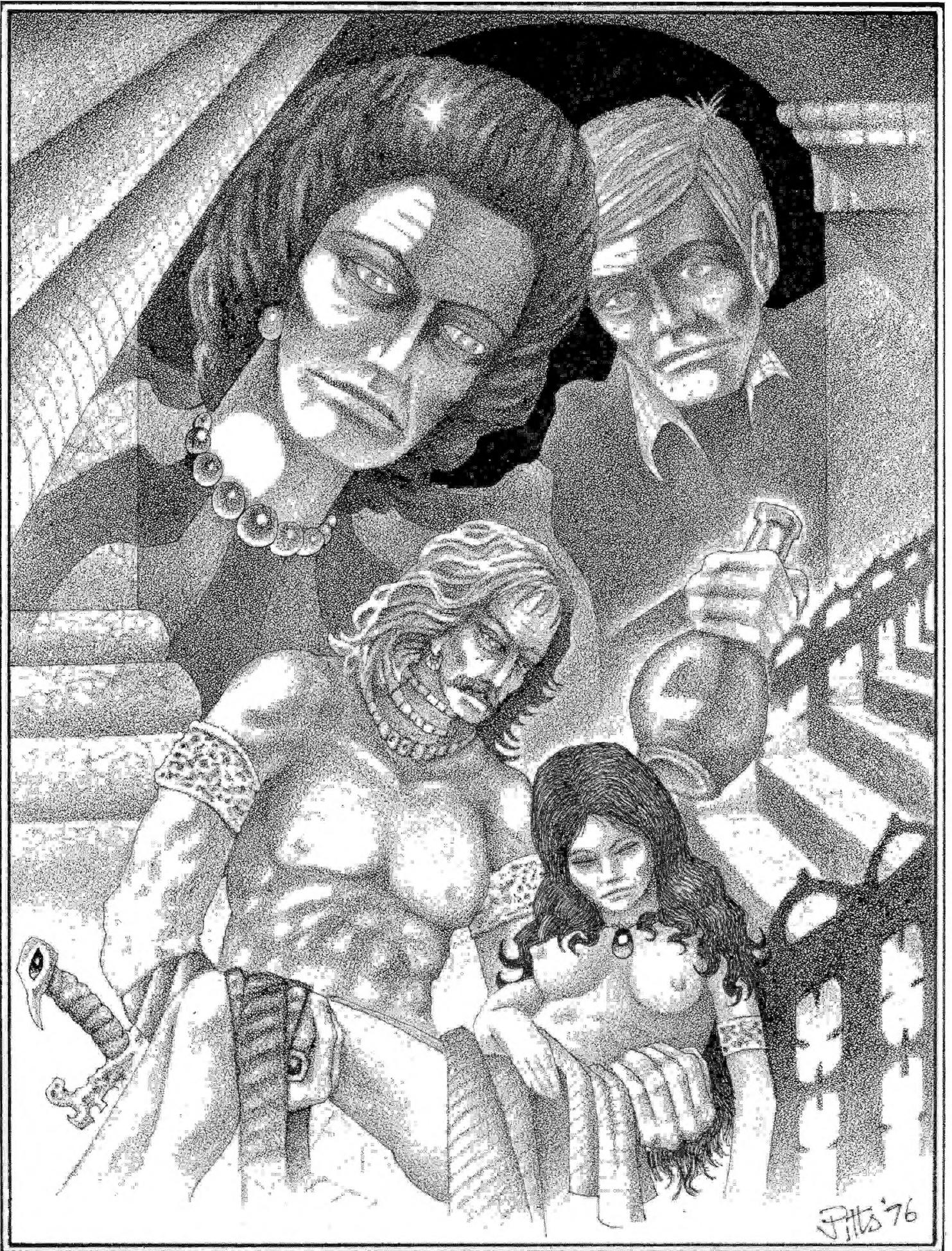
particular reality. He's a homely, ignorant-looking character whose very lack of dynamism only serves to increase feelings of sympathy and yet, paradoxically, when he gets himself into some blatantly ridiculous situation, the reader's mirth is increased tenfold. It's been about two years since *Vuzz* was issued but, judging by the regularity of as-yet uncollected *Vuzz* tales in magazines like *Metal Hurlant*, it shouldn't be too long before a sequel is due.

And so, we come right up to date with the work of Philippe Druillet. A young man, still in his early thirties, in terms of energy he has already outstripped many of his more seasoned colleagues. For, in addition to illustrating and in some cases writing the texts of his collections, he has designed countless French paperback book covers, notably some reprints of Edgar Rice Burroughs' Martian series; issued some of the most stunning posters ever to have emerged on the fantasy scene; contributed regularly to magazines like *Fantasie*, *Galaxie*, *Pelot*, and *Metal Hurlant* (and even had a shot at editing the last-named publication); yet still found time to embark upon such curious projects as the design of some very freaky jigsaws and wallpaper.

Druillet has come a long way since 1967 when a small firm called *Terrain Vague* released his imperfect *Les Aventures de Lone Sloane* but yet, the encouraging thing is that he has clearly a long time left to unleash the fruits of his vivid imagination upon the unsuspecting public. I mean to say, could you imagine what kind of movie director he could turn out to be? □

Illustration by John Severin, based upon Michael Moorcock's "The Eternal Champion"





Time disputes my passage. Time claws and slices at me, rasps me inside and out with wet-sandpaper cat tongues, as I fall through the hole, out of a dismal, overcast winter morning, into a warm, bright afternoon in the early summer of 1966. Time travel is a painful business. But I am not to be discouraged. I will not back out now. I have wanted and waited for this moment for seventeen years, and I won't give up just because there is some pain involved.

Emerging from the hole, I see Suzanne. She sits on the ground before me, wearing the white blouse and pleated gray skirt I have somehow remembered for more than a decade and a half, and she is of course exceptionally pretty, long, sleek legs held primly together, high young breasts, delicately molded hands folded in her lap. Her hair is long, thick, tumbling about her shoulders, a cascade of molten bronze. She looks up into my face as I am extruded through the hole. Her blue eyes widen with surprise and delight. I crouch before her, determined to explain how and why I have returned to claim her on this particular afternoon in 1966, when we are, both of us, eighteen years old, just out of high school, in love. But my explanation dies in my throat as she speaks my name; her voice, the sound of her voice after so many years, causes me more anguish than the trip through time. I decide that no words are necessary. We understand each other, we understand perfectly, for are we not in love?

Moving closer to her, I hook my fingers in the collar of her blouse, rip away the front of the garment, expose the brassiere and the barely contained mounds of her young woman's breasts. Suzanne bleats in sudden terror. I throw myself upon her, pushing the skirt and the slip up around her waist, shredding the pink undergarments with a strength I don't remember possessing at the age of eighteen.

She is beating me about the shoulders with her little fists, writhing under me, shrieking, "Stop, stop it, what do you think you're doing, no, stop it." but my own loins are uncovered now, I am not to be denied a second time, not after seventeen long years, and I thrust myself into her with such violence that the universe fractures, crumbles, a billion spinning, jagged-edged shards. I see, through a settling cloud of this shrapnel, Dr. Colin's round face as he bends over me, testing the electrodes taped to my skull. He is frowning.

"You mustn't persist in doing that," he says. His fingers are cold and clammy against my forehead. "That isn't socially acceptable behavior."

"You had *no right* to interfere!" I am sobbing, sobbing with frustration. I strain against the straps binding me to the table, trying to break free so that I might make Dr. Colin, this moon-faced, greasy-skinned little tormentor of mine, bleed. I want to strike him now almost as much as I've always wanted to have Suzanne. "You never said you'd interfere! You said you only wanted to moni-

tor me!"

"I never said I wouldn't interfere," he says in the bland tone I have learned to hate since coming to this dreadful place. "You had no right to attack the girl."

"She *wanted* me, don't you understand? We loved each other, for Christ's sake, we were at the point in our relationship where it followed we should make love!"

"You call that making love?"

"Why didn't you leave us the hell alone?"

"Because I'm here to help you." He begins peeling the tape from my slick scalp, removing the electrodes which feed my little impulses into recording and interpreting devices. "I'd be remiss in my duty if I let you go on repeating the mistakes of the past. You're becoming tiresome, you know. Anyway, we'll take another crack at it tomorrow. Until then—"

"No! Send me back now! Send me back *now*, this instant!"

The last of the electrodes come off. Dr. Colin gestures to someone standing out of my line of vision: Kley, the Neanderthaloid orderly.

"Until then," Dr. Colin says (oh, the uncouth fiend, I'll get loose one of these times, I'll kill him, I'll kill him slowly and lovingly!), "I want you to get some rest. It'd make everything a whole lot easier for both of us, you know, if you'd only cooperate. We don't enjoy having to strap you to your bed, do we, Kley?"

Kley steps into my line of vision then, big, impassive, his beady black eyes glittering in their recesses, and removes the clamp from my head. I will kill Kley, too. I've always hated and feared him. He is a sadist. He's *glad* they can't sedate me without deadening my ability to travel through time; he *does* enjoy strapping me to my bed, drawing the cinches so tightly about me that breath and circulation are virtually cut off. Kley is a sadist—he belongs on Dr. Colin's table, not me.

But can I ever convince Dr. Colin of this? No.

Dr. Colin brings Dr. East into my room. Kley carries in a chair, gives me a look which seems to say, *Not a word to them about me, or you'll be sorry*, as he sets it next to my bed and departs. Dr. East sits. Both doctors smile at me.

"Dr. Colin here tells me that you're chronopathic," Dr. East says. She is a thin, leathery-looking woman who keeps the stem of an unlighted pipe clamped between her teeth as she talks. "He also tells me that you're a dangerous man."

"Yes. I'm a dangerous man, all right." I flash her a grin. "As Dr. Colin and that creep Kley will find out, if I ever get loose in this place."

Dr. East nods. "I see. And you can really travel through time, into your own past?"

I would shrug, but I can't budge my shoulders. "Maybe."

"Would you mind giving me some sort of demonstration sometime?"

"Would you kiss my ass?"

Dr. Colin sighs, shakes his head, says to his colleague, "I warned you, Elaine. He's never willing to talk about anything."

Dr. East shuts him up with a wave of her hand, then leans toward me, her expression grave. "I want to find out all about you. Why, for instance, you sexually assaulted a number of young women and teenage girls."

"That's one of the reasons you're here."

"I never raped anybody, I tell you! All those bitches wanted it, they *wanted* it."

Dr. East takes the pipe from her mouth for the first time since we started talking and aims it at my face, like a pistol. "That's not what they said."

"What they said and what they wanted are two different things. I know when a woman wants it. I can always tell." The injustice of it all breaks over me like a wave. A whimper escapes my lips. "It isn't fair that I should be a prisoner here. I didn't do anything every other normal guy in the world hasn't done. Why don't you go put *them* in jail, too, instead of just picking on me?"

"You aren't in jail," Dr. East says mildly.

"And you should be grateful for that much," Dr. Colin puts in. "Since the death penalty was reinstated in this state, six rapists have been executed. You'd have gone to the electric chair, too, you know, if your talent hadn't manifested itself."

"You're a patient at an institute for corrective psychotherapy," Dr. East says, "and you're very lucky to be here. Dr. Colin wants to find out everything he can about this odd talent of yours. I want to find out everything I can about you. We both want to help."

"Out your ass," I say, managing a conversational tone.

Dr. Colin shakes his head again and gives me a sorrowful look. "We can't do much for you without your cooperation."

"Why don't you leave us alone for a few minutes?" Dr. East asks him. "Let me talk to him in private."

When he is out of the room, Dr. East returns her pipe to her mouth and fixes her gaze on me.

"Now," she says, "tell me, what are your dreams like?"

I go down through the hole again, into 1966 again.

Because I know that Dr. Colin is monitoring me at the far end, I waste no time: I fall out of the hole directly onto Suzanne's back, hurling her forward, face down in the grass, and immediately push up her skirt, wrench down her underwear. She is bone-dry, and penetration is not easy. I nevertheless succeed at wedging myself into her while she screams and claws at the ground, tearing up great handfuls of grass. Just when I am buried to the hilt in my love's precious upturned bottom, Dr. Colin jerks me back to the table.

"No!" he squeals. His ordinarily colorless face is mottled with fury. "No, no, *no!*" He realizes that he has lost control of himself and is setting a terrible example for me, and he regains his composure with some effort, but quickly. "You aren't supposed to rape her. You aren't supposed to *rape* her, do you understand?"

"Rape?" I am indignant. "I've never raped

anybody!"

Somewhere out of sight, Kley guffaws softly. Dr. Colin glares in the orderly's direction, then returns his attention to me.

"I can't help you, you know, unless you let me," and he has Kley take me back to my room.

And Kley, as usual, tightens the straps as much as he dares.

"On a white metal bench at the edge of a cliff overlooking the ocean, I sit with Suzanne while someone, a woman, my mother, maybe, half-reclines on the ground before us and tenderly holds my ankle in her hand."

Dr. East scribbles on her notepad while I describe my dream. When we have finished, she gives me a solemn look and says, "Who is Suzanne?"

"My girl friend. My first, my one true love."

"In high school?" she asks, and I nod. "That's why you keep going back to that one summer afternoon in 1966, isn't it? What happened that day that you keep going back to?"

"None of your business."

"Dressed as a giant raven, I go to answer the doorbell and find the postman on the front steps, holding a parcel."

Dr. East takes it all down, puts her notepad aside, produces a black-and-white photograph which she holds up for my inspection. It is of a girl with light-colored hair and light-colored eyes.

"Suzanne," I murmur.

"No," the doctor says. "Rhonda Campbell, whom you aussaulted on August 24th of last year."

"Suzanne," I murmur, staring at a different photograph of the girl with the light-colored hair and eyes.

"No," Dr. East says. "Jennifer Eubanks, your third victim. Last December 15th."

"No," says Dr. East. "Constance Henderson, your last and youngest victim." She puts the photograph away. "What are we to make of the fact that all five of your victims were between the ages of seventeen and twenty? And—"

"You must be mistaken. That's a picture of Suzanne. I'd know her anywhere."

She produces another photograph. "And what are we to make of the fact that each of the five victims bore a passing resemblance to the person in this picture."

She shows me the picture, a fuzzy print of a graduation portrait.

"Suzanne."

Dr. East nods. "Yes. Suzanne."

I am with Suzanne, seventeen years away, on a warm, bright day in the early summer of 1966. We lie together in shade, our clothes in disarray. My hand goes from the sensuous swell of her hip to briefly cup her left breast, then back down, under her skirt, to the hot flesh of her inner thigh. Her eyes close. She sighs, and her dreamy expression tells me, *yes, now, this time*. The aroma of our lust seems to hang, almost palpable, in the still air.

Joined at last, at long last, we are quiet for several seconds, awed by our accomplishment. My face is in her bronze-colored hair. Her lips are close to my ear. "I love you," she whispers, and I whisper back, "I love you, too," and we begin to move. Then I awake, screaming, Kley is shaking me, Dr. Colin is ready for another session.

This latest session is not like the others. For the first time, Dr. East is present. The inevitable unlighted pipe sticking out of her face, she stands at the foot of the table and stares at me strangely while Dr. Colin is strapping me down and attaching me to the monitors.

When all is in readiness, the doctors nod meaningfully at each other.

Dr. East says, "What happened on June 7th, 1966?"

I don't answer.

"Why," she insists, "do you keep going back to that one day? What happened then that you've been trying to change?"

"I'm ready," I tell Dr. Colin. "Send me back now, come on, I'm ready to go."

Dr. Colin does nothing. The lights above the table are too bright. I cannot concentrate, can't fix on the hole through time, with the lights shining into my eyes.

"What went on between you and Suzanne Nichols that day?" Dr. East says. "What *really* happened?"

"Find out for yourself, damn you, send me back now!"

"This much I have found out for myself," and some quality in Dr. East's tone compels me lock eyes with her. "On June 7th, 1966, a car with two people in it missed a curve, plunged over a steep embankment and burst into flames. The driver of the car was thrown clear and escaped with minor abrasions. The passenger di—"

"NO! GOD DAMN YOU, NO!"

And, lights or no lights, I shut her out, and I go down into the hole. Escaping into 1966.

So we are standing together in the shade of an oak tree on a warm, bright afternoon of early summer. I put my back to the tree, lean against it, facing Suzanne. I do not feel well.

"What's the matter?" she asks. "You look . . . I don't know, sad or something like that. What's wrong?"

I look at her disconsolately. "What's the date?"

She seems puzzled for a second. "June 7th. Why?"

"And the time?"

She glances at her wristwatch. "Two-fifteen, two-sixteen."

"Oh, God."

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing. It's nothing."

I am, or, rather, my eighteen-year-old self, whom I have absorbed and by whom been absorbed, is confused, uneasy, gripped by a vague premonition. I, the thirty-five-year-old me, think of the girl Suzanne, beautiful Suzanne, of what she has come to mean to my younger self during the past several weeks, and of how, at approximately three o'clock in the afternoon, June 7th, 1966, she will die horribly, trapped in the flaming wreckage

of an automobile which I will have driven over a twenty-foot embankment. She will be burnt to a crisp, and I will black out at her funeral.

This accident will be the climax of a long, passionate afternoon also worthy of note as the occasion of my younger self's latest and, unbeknownst to him, last unsuccessful attempt to consummate his love for the girl.

Suzanne is to die. I know this; my dread is infecting my eighteen-year-old self. Suzanne is to die, and I am to grieve for months afterward, then regret, then, finally, ultimately, resent, for it will occur to me by and by that she would be alive if she hadn't withheld herself from me as she was forever doing.

If she hadn't done that, we would not have had the argument.

If we hadn't been arguing, I would not have missed the curve and plunged us over the embankment. And she would still be alive.

"I've waited seventeen years for you, Suzanne." I say to her as I take her hand and draw her to me. She giggles, not understanding but glad that my mood has changed. I embrace her with a desperation which she mistakes for passion. Her breasts flatten against my chest. I feel the trickle of desire in my loins. "I really do love you." I really do love her; I'm amazed by the intensity of my love for her. There is more that I would tell her—how this day and all the rest of my days will turn out if we are not careful, how I have never ceased to ache for her and grieve for her in the years to come and yet, at the same time, have never, never forgiven her, how we are to conduct ourselves, what we must do, if she is to survive June 7th, 1966—but now she is trying to push me away.

"You're holding me too tightly," she gasps. "I can't breathe."

I pay no attention to her, only force her to the ground and collapse atop her. She is becoming angry, too. She is unused to such rough treatment. When I have her pinned to the grassy ground and start tearing at her clothes, the anger drains from her face and is replaced with fear. She is struggling, crying out to me, ordering me to stop, let her up, get off, but I will not be denied.

I will *not* be denied.

"Suzanne," I mutter as I pry her thighs apart and poise myself at her portals, "Suzanne, this is the only way to save your life, trust me, it's the only way, don't you understand? And it's the only way I can save myself, regain some of the tenderness," and I'm ripping into her body now, "some of the love I knew when I was with you, things I've lost and missed in the seventeen years I've spent without you, seventeen *years* of longing for you, wanting you all the time. . ."

She won't listen to me. She cries, screams, fights, claws at me as I work my way into her body. I feel Dr. Colin trying to pull me away, but I *won't be denied this time*. I will have my long lost love at last, now and forever, all will be well from this time on. And yet, even as release comes, I suddenly have a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach that something still is wrong somewhere, that Suzanne and I aren't going to be on exactly the best of terms on the way home, in the car. □



Logo: J. K. Smith

I had intended, this time around, to enthral you all with a ribald account of how, dressed in naught but a leather flying helmet, silver codpiece, white fur knee-boots and a tee-shirt which loudly boasted: 'I CHOKED LINDA LOVELACE,' I visited a local cinema to experience the visual pleasures of a pair of Continental films called, respectively, LOVE IN A WOMAN'S PRISON and THREE PERVERTS IN A BOAT. Unfortunately, though, "Certain Individuals have admonished me with stern warnings and suggested that the highly explicit nature of these ramblings might prove offensive to younger readers, adults and cucumber fondlers all over the world." So, bearing all this in mind, I'm afraid that this gripping installment of *Crosswinds* will have to be yet another "stimulating survey of all that is new in British SF and Fantasy publishing." I'm sorry about that, but if you are all well-behaved, I might include some stirring passages from my latest eroto-sci-fi novel, NINE QUEENS IN JELLO, in the next issue. Can't say fairer than that, can I?

So, to begin: some critics have severely castigated me (it was no joke, I can tell you—brought tears to my eyes!) for failing to give coverage to fantasy music projects in *Crosswinds 1*. Well, to explain, there was actually a reason for ignoring this particular field. I'm pretty suspicious of most of the currently fashionable groups who claim to play "cosmic music" and who, in reality, are merely repeating (on a vastly inferior level in many cases) the same concepts which innovators have been exploring for years. —As an example, how far on has Miles Davis progressed since the days of Coltrane?— Real fantasy music can only be appreciated on a subjective level and analysed principally in terms of the feelings which it arouses in the listener. So then, based upon my own emotional reactions to MOON MADNESS, the latest album from that superb band, Camel, I'm prepared to recommend this collection of pieces as one of the better examples of fantasy music to emerge from Britain in 1976.

For, moreso than ever before, there is a remarkably large degree of some noticeably spaced-out interplay between the snarling keyboards of Pete Bardens and the absolutely dynamic cutting guitar of Andy Latimer. Thankfully, the band has at last realised the restrictions and disadvantages of playing as a collection of four distinctly separate virtuosos and now come together to form one of the tightest and most exciting musical units on the contemporary scene.

It's true that they still have a long way to go—there are some Pink Floyd/Santana/Mahavishnu Orchestra-type influences which tend to become slightly distressing but, on the whole, I was favourably impressed with MOON MADNESS. Stand-out tracks are

SPRIT OF THE WATER and LUNAR SEA, though ANOTHER NIGHT—obviously the most commercial track on the album—features a *deadly* guitar solo which almost rivals Latimer's sterling performance on HOMAGE TO THE GODS OF LIGHT from the highly recommended album, THE GREASY TRUCKERS LIVE AT DINGWALL'S benefit album.

Another excellent collection of hard-hitting and pleasantly profound pieces of music is STRANGE NEW FLESH by Colosseum 2. Fronted by Belfast's own Gary Moore—a guitarist who, when he was seventeen, was so far advanced that the legendary Leslie West refused to play on the same stage—and respected drummer, Jon Hiseman, Colosseum 2 is more of a jazz-based group than Camel but, in the subtle way they build up power—and indeed emotion—could only be described as something like a more refined version of the early King Crimson.

Although Moore's style has mellowed, his strangely distorted and individual guitar exhibits all the old finesse and magic which made Skid Row into the near legend which they were. Hiseman's almost demented drumming pushes the band on with a vengeance and the beautifully laid-back combination of bass, keyboards and soothing vocals are incomparable. The title track on this album with its restrained loneliness and agony is something that you won't forget for a long, long time.

But, you are saying as you turn to pat your pet schoolgirl lovingly on the head, "What news on the literature scene?" Well, on that subject, perhaps I'd better turn to the subject of *Dunwich House*. The undulating heartlands of Belgium have never particularly struck me as being the perfect birthplace for a fantasy publishing house. However, a recent letter from Eddy Bertin—writer, anthologist, reviewer, translator, as his letterheading insinuates ever so intimidatingly—has shattered my boyish illusions forever. Eddy tells me that, by the time you read this, some more of his limited edition Dunwich House booklets should be on sale. (To the best of my knowledge, the name of young Jonathan Bacon was mentioned in connection with my enquiries about US agents.) The booklets are volumes 2 and 3 of Eddy's Lovecraftian series and are entitled *The Lovecraft Chronobibliography of His Fiction* and *The Lovecraft Chronobibliography of His Books* and they are priced at \$3.00 each. A further Dunwich House production which sounds very exciting is *Eyurid*, a Lovecraftian story in strip form—14 to 16 full-page drawings printed one-sided on quality paper, from the Dutch artist Thijs Van Ebbenhorst-Tengberger (he's commonly called Tais Teng, thank Christ!) whose work has been favourably

compared to that of Phillippe Druillet. *Eyurid* will also contain an introduction, notes and a specially written story to go along with the folio. Copies can be ordered for \$5.00 and, as in common with all Dunwich House projects, the print run is very small. I strongly suggest that you order your copy now!

I've just returned from the Birmingham SF Group's NOVACON and, whilst doing my best to keep up the Irish reputation—wearing Arran sweaters, drinking Guinness, swearing loudly and spitting all over the floor—I happened to pick up a couple of pieces of what I consider to be interesting news, the first of which was the impending publication of a new magazine called *Fantasy Tales*.

The brainchild of Dave Sutton (an able anthologist whose magazine, SHADOW, revolutionised UK small press publications) and Steve "The Streetfighter" Jones (editor of the excellent DARK HORIZONS) *Fantasy Tales* promises to be the fantasy magazine which will at last bring British fanzines to a level comparable to their slick American counterparts.

Over a glass of sparkling Blue Ruin, Professor Sutton remarked that the first issue of *Fantasy Tales* should be making its appearance next February. Print run for the first issue will be 1,000 copies. As well as featuring colour covers and professional typesetting, *Fantasy Tales* has already attracted contributors such as Ramsey Campbell, Brian Lumley, Adrian Cole and—wait for it—MICHAEL MOORCOCK! Now then, are you all panting with anticipation? If so, make your enquiries to Professor Sutton at: 194, Station Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham B14 7TE, England.

My meeting with artist Tony Schofield at NOVACON was one of the high points of the weekend (and that includes the appearance of a nubile Newcastle-upon-Tyne version of Red Sonya outside the door of our room at a rather curious and inappropriate time). I had seen some of Tony's work in early issues of NEBULA and, being suitably impressed, asked him to give me a sneak look at his latest illustrations. It's no exaggeration to say that a crowd had gathered around us within a few minutes. His latest work is breathtaking! Like a cross between Barry Smith and Druillet but with an added something which neither of these two gentlemen possess! I was so staggered by the craftsmanship

of Tony Schofield's work that I immediately agreed to publish some of his art in the form of a large comic. All arrangements have not been finalised, so keep your eyes open for further developments.

To get back to NOVACON, though: I was slightly disappointed with the whole affair. Admittedly the conversation was fine (if you're into the technicalities of tying certain bondage knots or telling jokes about colostomies); the book selections were nice (I finally did manage to complete my set of Jack

Vance fist editions); there was a reasonable amount of alcohol; and yet, possibly because there seemed to be an unfair bias towards the more "pseudo-SF" genres like wargaming, and a totally abysmal discotheque whose deejay didn't have a single record from before 1938, I felt that the convention failed miserably. Hopefully though, with a new committee, the Birmingham SF Group will organise a better event next year.

Weird Tales fanatics will be pleased to note the imminent British publication of some paperbacks from two of that famous magazine's "Big Three." Hot on the heels of *King Kull* by Robert E. Howard, other volumes such as *The Dark Man*, *Marchers of Valhalla* and *Three-Bladed Doom* (featured in *Lone Star Fictioneer 4*) are scheduled. Orbit has yet to announce a firm publication date for *Son of the White Wolf*, but I imagine that we should expect it out in the first half of 1977. Of note also from Panther Books in 1977 is a two-volume set of Clark Ashton Smith's *Other Dimensions*.

Conan freaks will be no doubt wanting to get their hands on *Les Clous Rouges* (a French version of *Red Nails*)—a 64-page Barry Smith which has just been published by Les Humanoides Associes, the same firm who do *Metal Hurlant*. I haven't as yet seen a copy of *Les Clous Rouges* but my Gallic business associate, Toulouse le Vache-Crappe informs me that this edition will *not*, as previously advertised, be bound in mastodon skin or hand-coloured from vulture waste. Apparently prices have been crippling to our French cousins and so they have been forced reluctantly to issue *Les Clous Rouges* as an ordinary paperback comic. If you do want a copy, order from Andromeda Books, 57 Summer Row, Birmingham, England, or Forever People, 12, The Promenade, Gloucester Rd. Bristol, England.

Metal Hurlant 9 has, incidentally, been published, and my advice is to pass it by and spend your hard-earned cash on something else. The page count of this latest issue has been increased to 100, but I must say I'm totally turned off by the new editorial policies. Gone are all the wonderful full-colour Corben strips only to be replaced by what I could best describe as "abysmally drawn and poorly reasoned soft porn and horror." Even Phillipe Druillet's contributions are substandard—a situation I'd never hoped to see. Still, this lapse may be only temporary. We'll know when issue 10 appears.

I must digress slightly to talk about something which puzzles me. Why is it that all my US correspondents are so excited by the fantasy book releases from Britain? OK, I'll accept that we do have a hell of a lot of books by Moorcock—and almost the complete set of Conans—but apart from those, there's absolutely nothing of much interest being released. Most of the *good* stuff is coming over from America—people like Tanith Lee or Brian Lumley (who, unbelievably, has yet to see print in UK paperbacks). Perhaps it's just a case of the other man's grass is always greener, but I'm pretty convinced that most of the professional publishing houses in the UK are organised and staffed by cretins. Take Mayflower, for instance. They released Jack Vance's *Star King* in 1973. They've

made no attempt to follow through with *The Killing Machine* or *The Palace of Love*. The same firm, incidentally, on a page from *The Houses of Iszm*, advertised *Five Gold Bands* as a forthcoming release. Now why the hell did they do that? Mayflower isn't the only offender—they just serve to illustrate what the situation is like. Thankfully, Star Books has—just when I despaired of ever reading a good book—rereleased Edgar Pangborn's *Davy*, *The Company of Glory* and *West of the Sun*. As a matter of course, the covers are typically SF-futuristic style crap—you know what I mean, technically advanced galleons ploughing through choked seas of corruption beside ruined cities whose eroded skyscrapers point accusing fingers toward the livid sky (did you like that?). Happily though, the story content is spot-on, being an ingenious mixture of adventure, lewd humour (who else would dare to describe the hero as "well-hung"?) and excitement. Grand stuff!! It did my heart good to see that at least someone is exercising a fair amount of discretion in these heady days of decadence and corruption. The bad thing is that Britain is a long way from possessing such fine publishing houses as Zebra, DAW, Mirage and all those other institutions which US fandom seems to take so much for granted. All I can say is: Don't criticise too loudly—you could be in a much worse position.

And don't groan too loudly either, when I talk about Mick Farren again. I honestly can't help discussing the fortunes of our one-time rock star because his trilogy of books—*The Quest of the DNA Cowboys*, *Synaptic Manhunt* and *Neutral Atrocity*—are in the process of being unleashed on an unsuspecting public. I've already read *DNA Cowboys* and started on *Manhunt* (the third volume comes out in January—aargh!) and they aren't particularly bad books but, in common with most of Mick's stuff, I fail to see much content and even less meaning in these bombed-out rambblings. My advice is that if you want to suffer irreparable brain damage, read the Farren trilogy. Otherwise read all the Lin Carter books you can get your hands on!

Moorcock's *Sailor on the Seas of Fate* has finally seen print and although it's unquestionably a fine Elric-based book, I would advise all of you who are saving up to come over to England for FANTASYCON 3 (more about that later) to wait until the book emerges as a paperback, because I personally wouldn't pay £3.75 for even a Moorcock book. When you consider the man's stamina and the fact that it should soon be issued in a less expensive edition, it's not worthwhile, is it? Other recent Moorcock hardbacks have been *Legends From the Edge of Time* (with a beautiful cover, reminiscent of early Roger Dean) and *Una Persson and Catherine Cornelius in the 20th Century*. The *Legends* book is well written and uproariously funny in places but, as I've been refused a review copy of the *Persson/Cornelius* extravaganza on three separate occasions, I really can't comment on its particular merits.

Fantasy calendars are apparently big business these days and the best I've seen recently is from the prolific Roger Dean, a man made famous with his stylised album covers for top groups like Yes, Greenslade, Gun,

Midnight Sun and a whole host of others. Featuring such splendid plates as the stunning artwork which graced the album covers of *Relayer* and *Beside Manners are Extra*, the calendar can be obtained from Andromeda Books (price £2.20). Other news from the Roger Dean scene is that he'll be doing two books in collaboration with Harlan Ellison. The first will have Dean illustrations to an original Ellison story while the other will be an Ellison yarn written around some Dean paintings.

Although they can't be strictly classed as lying within the ken of true fantasy, I'd better mention the new series of books from Aldus, which go under the general title of *A New Library of the Supernatural*. There will be a total of twenty volumes each of 35,000 words and they will be fully illustrated—in both colour and black and white. The General Editor of the series will be Colin Wilson, ably edited by Dr. Christopher Evans (interested parties should check out his book *Cults of Unreason*). But the titles of the volumes in *A New Library of the Supernatural* are: *Men of Strange Powers; Signs of Things to Come; Wisdom From Afar; Visitors From Outer Space; Monsters and Mythic Beasts; Vanished Civilisations; The Book of Myths and Miracles; Healing Without Medicine; Gods and Devils; Strange Cults; Enigmas and Unsolved Mysteries; The Book of Numbers and Words; Minds Without Boundaries; Spirits and Spirit Worlds; Ghosts and Poltergeists; Zombies, Vampires and Monster Men; The Book of Witches and Magic; The Cosmic Influence; Alchemy—The Oldest Science* together with a complete guide and index. Phew! There you are now! Not exactly my cup of tea but it's worth bearing in mind that, armed with that lot, you should be able to entice *any* aloof little schoolgirl back into the comfort of your houseboat. On second thought, better forget that idea! If you're like me and have a terrible memory you'll need to keep the books constantly to hand. That could cause troubles because if you're the type of person who prowls lonely parks hunting for attractive youngsters, you'll definitely need surgery on a strangulated hernia after carting the Aldus series around for a few hours.

But—cue a fanfare of trumpets!!—A Notice To All Yanquis Who Will Be In Britain in Early 1977!!! That august little organisation, The British Fantasy Society, would be honoured if you would hire a helicopter and get your asses along to FANTASYCON 3 which will be held in the Imperial Hotel, Temple Street, Birmingham during the last weekend in February. The Guest of Honour will be Basil Copper, a gentleman who can write a mean horror story when he has a mind to. Other attending notables will include Ramsey Campbell, Brian Lumley, Adrian Cole and Milton Subotsky (now director of *Sword and Sorcery* Films). The Master of Ceremonies will be the irrepressible Ken Bulmer who—believe it or not—was mistaken for H. P. Lovecraft by a new fan at FANTASYCON 2. (Come to think of it, he did look slightly cadaverous!) But, as if all this isn't enough, there will be a star-studded programme to delight even the shyest of persons. As well as the usual talks and discussions

there will be an evening devoted to Folk Music and Poetry and rumour has it that a new incarnation of the Runestaff Boogie Band may condescend to appear. Can you afford to miss FANTASYCON 3? Supporting membership is \$1.00 from Brian Mooney, 447a Porters Avenue, Dagenham Essex RM9 4ND.

I'm sure that most of you are aware that the highly successful *Illuminatus* trilogy is currently being issued in paperback in the United Kingdom, but how many of you are aware that two wonderful guys by the name of Ken Campbell and Chris Langham are staging a stage version of the story in Liverpool in conjunction with the Science Fiction Theatre of Liverpool? By chance, I ran into Ken Campbell at NOVACON and was immediately infected by the excitement which he has for the project. The opening night for the play is November 23rd, which—after reading the trilogy—struck me as being a particularly apt date. Ken and Chris have broken the play into five parts—*The Eye in the Pyramid*, *Swift Kick, Inc.*, *The Men Who Murdered God*, *Walpurgisnacht Rock* and *Leviathan* and the plan is to stage each separate part on a week-night and perform the full cycle on Sundays. After freaking out Liverpool with this awesome spectacle, the troupe plan to do a show in Belfast, before moving on to Amsterdam. I've already approached the Northern Ireland Arts Council for a grant to stage the show at Queens University but, to be frank, they're such an antiquated group of people that I don't anticipate much success. Anyway, if you'd like an *Illuminatus* programme or would even like to air your views about the relevance of the trilogy, Ken Campbell at The Liverpool School of Language, Music, Drama and Pun, 18 Matthew Street, Liverpool 2, would be glad to hear from you.

Poster freaks take note! Now available from the pen and brush of Jim Fitzpatrick (whose work will soon be appearing in *Chacal* and *Fantasy Crossroads*) is a series of six full colour posters depicting heroes and heroines from the ancient Celtic mythologies. As I've said in other publications, Jim is perhaps the best artist ever to have come from Ireland. (If you don't believe me, have a look at his illustration for the latest Thin Lizzy album cover, *Johnny the Fox*). He does exhibit tiny little traces of Mucha, Beardsley, Harry Clarke and—to a lesser extent—Barry Smith, but it soon becomes clear that he's a very accomplished illustrator in his own right. The posters will retail for about \$3.50 each, but if you would like details of airmail rates and future Fitzpatrick projects, send a couple of International Reply Coupons to: The De Danaan Press, 136 Sandyford Road, Dundrum, Dublin 14, Eire.

Rodney Marsh, a highly versatile illustrator whose posters have been the subject of much favourable criticism in the past, has now released a set of posters illustrating scenes from the Sword and Sorcery sagas of Michael Moorcock. They are drawn in a rather quaint and whimsical style but if you're a Moorcock fan, you'll definitely want to add them to your collection. Price—as with the Fitzpatrick prints—is \$3.50 from Andromeda Books.

To conclude, a recent Irish publication which, due to its specialised subject matter, will only appeal to collectors, is the limited-edition pressing of *The Voyage of St. Brendan* from the Dolmen press of Dublin. This 750-copy print run is illustrated by some tasteful 15th century woodcuts, is hand-bound and hand typeset. For collectors who really desire something just that little bit special, there are 10 copies of *The Voyage of St. Brendan* available with hand coloured illustrations. And the price! A mere \$30.00! Buy two!

Well now, before pottering off to the solace of a hamburger and a pint of buttermilk, I'd better do my duty and list the forthcoming British publications: *Orsinian Tales* (hardback—non-fiction) by Ursula K. Le Guin; *Darkness Weaves*, *Death Angel's Shadow*, *Bloodstone* and *Dark Crusade* by Karl Edward Wagner; *Low Flying Aircraft* (hardback) by J. G. Ballard; *Slapstick, or Lonesome No More* (hardback) by Kurt Vonnegut; *The Prince's Bride* by William Goldman; *The Hawkline Monster* by Richard Brautigan; *Letters From a Lost Uncle* by Mervyn Peake; *The Stone Book* (first in a trilogy) by Alan Garner; *History of the SF Magazines: Vol. 1* by Mike Ashley; *The Powers of the Serpent* by Peter Valentine Timlett and the latest news that John Brunner has approached his publisher with a view to reprinting his rare *The Traveller in Black* whilst Dobson is reported to be interested in a hardback edition of the equally rare *Big Planet/Slaves of the Klau* by Jack Vance.

So! That's it for now. As they say in Ireland, Pugma Ho! □



Space limitations prevent us from mentioning each and every item of interest to fans of the genre, but we'll try to cram as much information into this column as possible. Publishers are invited to send along any pertinent data on their forthcoming products for inclusion on this page.

All doubting Thomases should set aside their fears: *Nickelodeon no. 2* is indeed ready for mailing, despite the noticeable lack of ads for it. Living up to its title (for the most part, anyway) as "The Exotic Science Fiction & Fantasy Quarterly," the second issue features both male and female centerfolds (two, count 'em: two!), color covers by Jim Thomas and George Barr, and literary contributions from Waldrop, Dann, Pohl, Editor Reamy, and others. And if that weren't enough, the price has been reduced from \$2.00 to a special sale tag of \$1.98—Tom's always been known as a sweetheart. And while you're writing a check, why not tack on an extra \$10.95 for a copy of *The Richard Corben Funny Book*, a hardcover collection of the celebrated artist's "underground" comic work. Featuring stories reproduced in both b&w and color, the edition highlights Corben's unique ability to draw the viewer

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into the story—an accomplishment that few illustrators can boast. To order, mail checks or m.o.s to The Nickelodeon Press, 1629 Scott, Independence, MO 64052.

Donald M. Grant continues to be the most active producer of collectors' editions for the field. Presently available from him are *The Devil in Iron* (the sixth volume in his deluxe Conan series, illustrated by Dan Green, \$15.), *To Quebec and the Stars* by H. P. Lovecraft (a collection of previously unpublished essays on various topics, edited by L. Sprague de Camp with a dust-jacket by Robert Macintyre, \$15.), and the gorgeous *Upon the Winds of Yesterday: The Paintings of George Barr* (see ad elsewhere in this issue). Forthcoming are illustrated editions of *The Chronicles of Lucius Leffing* by Joseph Brennan (illoed by John Linton), *Marchers of Valhalla* by REH (illoed in color by Marc Boas), *Dream of X* by William Hope Hodgson (illoed in color by Steve Fabian) and a second edition of *Pride of Bear Creek* by REH (illoed by Tim Kirk). Over the years, Mr. Grant has set the standards for other publishers to aim for by putting all of the time and care possible into his products. To receive color flyers on his books simply mail a request to Don Grant, Publisher/Bookseller, West Kingston, RI 02892.

American fandom seems to be a pretty loose-knit (though generally productive) group—conversely, Great Britain has a very close, active society gathering under the title of the BFS. And you don't have to be living in the U. K. to be a member. For a yearly fee of \$8, you're entitled to all BFS products (including the house fanzine, *Dark Horizons*, and the excellent bi-monthly *BFS Bulletin* which features news, art, reviews, controversial letters from various members, etc.), membership to *Whirlpool* (a critical writer's circle), and eligibility to vote for the yearly BFS Fantasy Award. Definitely informative, interesting and a great deal of fun—get involved! To join, send an international m.o. or bank check to Brian Mooney, Membership Secretary, 447A Porters Ave., Dagenham, Essex RM9 4ND, England. (And gang, would someone tell us the true story about Vice President John Harvey and the "Red Hot Ingrid" inflatable chicken at the *London Exposarama? Were* grapefruits used or weren't they??)

One of the most enjoyable products to appear on the market last year was the *Queen of the Black Coast* art folio published by The House of Fantasy. With art by Steve Fabian, the package was very highly thought of and went o. p. in record time. Well, Doug Kruse and Bud Bortner are at it a second time. Presently in production is a second Fabian folio, loosely based on *The Tower of the Elephant*. For more information why not send an sase to The House of Fantasy, 5503 Perry Ave., Merriam, KS 66203.

Fabian fans will also find of interest a three piece series of Conan posters currently available from *CSA Press* (Lakemont, GA). Priced at \$10 for the set, the featured paintings seem to be some of Steve's earlier work with only 1 of the 3 pieces truly coming up to his present standards of quality.

James D. Denny has established himself as an editor/publisher/artist/writer to marvel at

with his magazine, *Art & Story*. Ranging in appeal from light Tolkienish fantasy to hard SF, Jim captures the imagination of his readers without any question as to who the publication was produced for. His latest issue, no. 2, features Denny's own excellently hand-drawn comic strip (or "Graphic Fiction," as it is called), "The Black Star," fiction by Alan Dean Foster (beautifully illustrated by Clyde Caldwell), L. Frank Baum, and C. S. Lewis. A steal at \$2 from *Art & Story*, 32692 Black Mountain Rd., Tollhouse, CA 93667.

Richard Delap is doing one helluva job with his *F&SF Review*: comprised of short articles and reviews of the book and magazine contributions to the genre, the 'zine provides a valuable service to the discriminating reader and easily outshines all other review publications and columns inside and outside the field. Sometimes controversial, always interesting, *Delap's F&SF Review* should prove a worthwhile addition to your mailbox. Subscriptions for 12 issues (one year) runs \$9 and are available from Richard at 11863 W. Jefferson Blvd., Culver City, CA 90230.



Limners

Jonathan Bacon continues to grow and expand his operations with each passing month. Currently in print is his highly thought of *Fantasy Crossroads no. 10* and features a very nice cover by Ireland's Jim Fitzpatrick, part two of the REH Editors/Publishers Roundtable discussion (with more incisive comments from George Scithers, such as "No comment"), an interview with Don Grant, fiction, reviews, art, and news. All for a mere \$2.50. Also available from Jon is *Omniumgathum* (pronounce it however you wish): a huge collection of unpublished art and poetry by Lord Dunsany, Hannes Bok, August Derleth, William Hope Hodgson, Harry Warner, REH, Jeff Easley, Clyde Caldwell and literally an army of other celebrities. For a price, drop Jon an sase at Box 147, Lamoni, Iowa 50140.

Cinefantastique has deservedly earned the title of the fantasy film magazine. Featuring top-notch writing, behind the scenes facts and photos, biting criticism, and extensive use of interior color, this quarterly magazine is an event to look eagerly forward to. A sample copy is available from Frederick S. Clarke, Box 270, Oak Park, Ill. 60633, for \$4.

It's often been said that Texas is a country unto itself, so it seems only natural that the latest addition to your bookshelf should be *Lone Star Universe*, a collection of new SF stories by Texas' brightest group of writers. Edited by George Procter and Steven Utley, the book includes work by Tom Reamy, Lisa Tuttle, Howard Waldrop, Jake Saunders, and yes, Robert E. Howard—17 stories in all. With an introduction from foreigner Harlan Ellison, this hardcover edition is available for \$9.95 from Heidelberg Publishers, 1003 Brown Building, Austin TX 78701.

Subtitled "A Fanzine About Fantasy," *Nightshade* (under the editorship of Ken Amos, 7005 Bedford Lane, Louisville, KY 40222) proves to be an entertaining, albeit quick reading, publication. Steadily improving with each progressing issue, the magazine serves as a light bit of reading for all fans of the horror and weird fiction genres. Currently available for \$1.50 is *Nightshade no. 3* which features an exhaustive and valuable bibliography of Manly Wade Wellman and his works. Also featured are book reviews, news notes and art (including a very fine back-cover by young Greg Harper).

Of interest to sword & sorcery fans will be *Phantasy Digest no. 2* (\$4 per copy from Wayne Warfield, P. O. Box 326, Aberdeen, MD 21001). Spotlights in the issue is a new Brak the Barbarian novelette by John Jakes (known best, I suppose, for his bicentennial series), along with an interview with the author, a history of Jack Vance's "The Dying Earth" series, and a Solomon Kane art folio by Marcus Boas.

Portfolios these days are fairly commonplace, yet few feature illustrations that can really stand on their own merit—most have the appearance of enlarged comic pages and as such hardly inspire costly framing and an honored bit of wall space for display. However, *The Limners Press Portfolio* (available for \$17 from RFD 2, Box 345B, Dover, N. J. 07801) delightfully rises above the others and can truly be called "fine art." A limited edition of 650 signed and numbered copies, the folio boasts a folder and nine interior plates of various fantasy scenes—3 drawings each by Michael Hague, Tim Kirk, and Robert Haas. Mr. Haas' contributions are especially beautiful and are very reminiscent of Howard Pyle's classic interpretations of the Arthurian legends.

Coming this summer—May 25th, to be exact—is George Lucas' second excursion into the SF/Fantasy film genre: *The Star Wars*. Essentially old-fashioned space opera along the lines of Northwest Smith or Carson of Venus, the production entails numerous special effects (by John Dykstra), elaborate sets, and an impressive laser-sabre duel between the young hero, Luke Starstalker, and his comic-bookish antagonist. Undoubtedly, *The Star Wars* will be great viewing fun and generally entertaining in all its aspects, though it'll probably allow the term "SCI-FI" to rear its head once more. Lucas, who may be best remembered for *THX-1131* and *American Grafitti*, has long term plans for the Starstalker character and may produce a series based on the youthful adventurer's escapades.

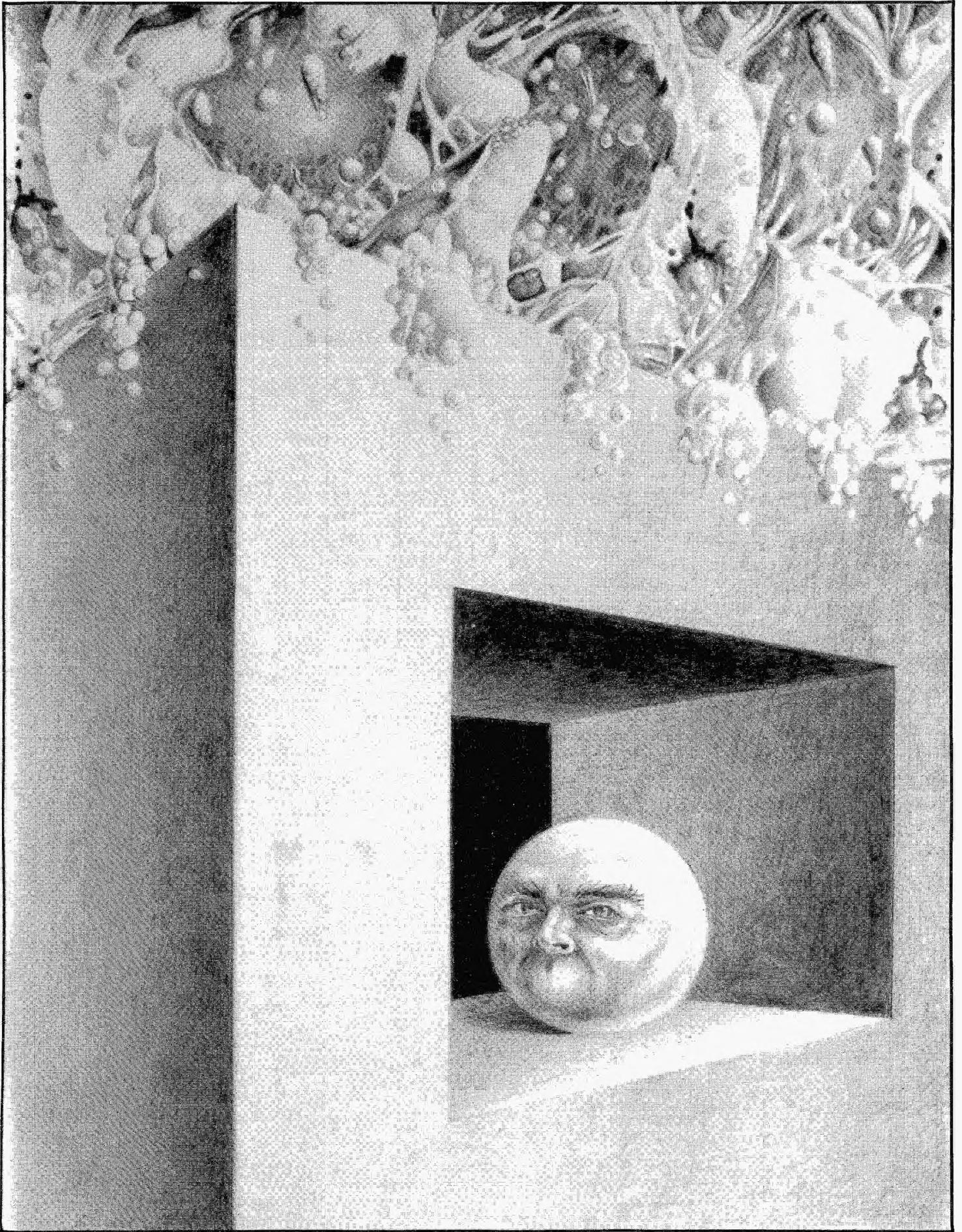


Illustration by Clyde Caldwell

