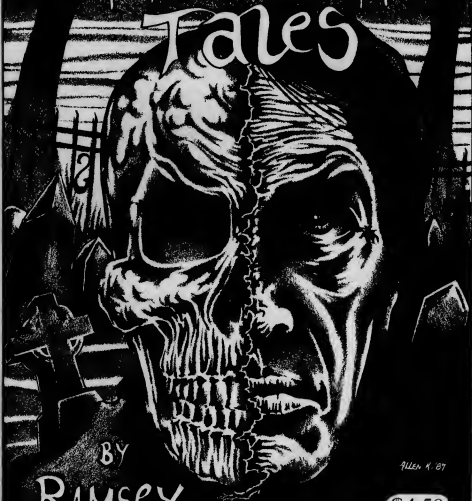


CRYPT OF CTHULHU # 50
PRESENTS

GHOSTLY Tales



BY

RAMSEY
CAMPBELL

ALLEN K. '87

\$4.50

for Dave → youthful indirection!
 a youthful indirection!
 All the best.
 Ramsey
 Hatfield
 Halloween
 1987

CRYPT OF CTHULHU

A Pulp Thriller and Theological Journal

Volume 6, Number 8

Michaelmas 1987

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it came from the past

T. V. Boardman & Co., Ltd.

Publishers

37, Hertford Street, London, W. 1

26th August, 1958

Master John R. Campbell,
40, Nook Rise,
LIVERPOOL, 15.

Dear John,

Thank you for sending us your illustrated book entitled GHOSTLY TALES. We have read these stories with great interest as they are very well written and show real promise but we regret that we must return them to you without an offer as we do not publish Ghost stories.

We should like to take this opportunity of encouraging you to continue with your writing because you have definite talent and very good imaginative qualities. It means a lot of hard work to become an author but with the promising start you have made there is every possibility that you will make the grade.

With very best wishes for a successful future.

Yours sincerely,

Tom Boardman, Jr.

I should think most of my readers know that it was August Derleth who launched me on my career, but now we see that Tom Boardman had encouraged me three years before I was in touch with Derleth. Tom Boardman's words are those of a prophet and a gentleman. I've often said that, had I been Derleth, I should have seen less promise in my early Lovecraftian oozings than he did; how perceptive Tom Boardman needed to be is for the reader of this book to judge. I propose to blame Bob Price for its resurrection, since while the rest of my audience at last year's World Fantasy Convention shuddered and blanched and groaned as I quoted from "The Hollow in the Woods," Bob was seized by an urge to behold the tale in all its ungainliness and then to send it staggering out into the world. I sent him a copy, and I didn't realize what I'd done until too late. The influence of this horror from the past had possessed him, and nothing short of publishing the entire tome, whose existence had previously been rumoured only in whispers, would satisfy him.

Disconcertingly, the book proves to be little worse than its main influence. This was Phantom, a magazine from Bolton, Lancashire, apparently edited by a large spider whose editorials were headed "A Word from the Web." The first (April 1957) issue claimed to publish "True Ghost Stories," but by the end, in July 1958, the subtitle had become "Weird Tales." Indeed, Weird Tales provided some reprints, by Leiber and Wellman and others, but it's the influence of tales by unknowns you will find in the present book. I believe I began writing these tales with an eye to submitting some of them to Phantom;

some (not necessarily the most technically competent) would have been entirely at home there. However, my mother, who regarded literary success as a possible way of financing her escape from her disastrous marriage, persuaded me to wait until I had a whole book to show to publishers, presumably on the basis that they would find a collection of unpublished tales more tempting. By the time I completed it and set about writing something else for Phantom, the magazine was about to fold.

I've little more to say, though my readers may thank me for delaying their acquaintance with the book. I've a lurking fondness for some aspects of it: the way I blithely invented a phrase and called it Egyptian, for instance. I see that many of the surnames of characters from "The Hollow in the Woods" onward were the names of schoolmates, including the six victims of Tom Bart, the murderer. The English teacher, Brother Kelly, used to have me read the stories to the class; I suppose at least the one that is clearly based on Dennis Wheatley seemed impeccably Christian. Other derivations I leave the reader to discover. I think it's clear how much I needed to study Lovecraft, and a couple of years later I did. Still, the book contains at least one line which too many of my contemporaries might have written, and perhaps it's worth publishing the book for the sake of the line and quite a few like it: "The door banged open, and the afore-mentioned skeleton rushed in."

Ramsey Campbell
Merseyside, England
24 May 1987



JOHN R CAMPBELL

GHOSTLY TALES

Illustrations by
JOHN R CAMPBELL



GHOSTLY TALES

Twelve o'clock's the time of night,
That the graves, all gaping wide,
Send forth grim gory spectres
The churchyard path to glide.

-THOMAS L. BEDDOES

The church clock sounds the midnight hour
O hush, or creeping creep I hear;

Three measured taps upon my pane;
I open my door with chuddring fear.

-ANONYMOUS

To My Mother,

With all my love

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The Haunted Manor

The manor stands in the centre
Of a circle of old, gnarled trees;
They guard it, like grim figures,
Never swaying in the breeze.

The Walls are thick with ivy,
The windows, gaping holes;
Now, the wind is whistling through them,
The sound, like crying souls.

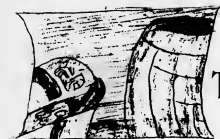
The manor is deserted,
For no-one dares go near;
The people in the country round
Speak of it with fear.

And now the wind stops howling,
And a bird flies up in fright;
It has seen a phantom walking
Through the dark and lonely night.

He is drawn towards a bloodstain
In a certain manor room;
Though dead, at night he haunts it,
For such must be his doom.

For here, he shot himself,
His debts were far too high;
Now, punished for eternity—
He can *never die!*





The Oak Chest

The clock struck midnight. An owl hooted somewhere out in the darkness. Rover, the dog, twitched in his sleep. Then he opened one eye, looked up the staircase that led to his master's and mistress's bedroom. . . . And then he leaped up, his teeth bared, his eyes bulging, every hair bristling.

For Something was coming down the stairs.

Mr. and Mrs. Johnson had found the oak chest in the attic when they bought the house. Johnson didn't care for it, and Mrs. Johnson hated "those cats' heads," which were cat faces, carved on the lid of the chest.

One day, three weeks after they had moved in, Jane (Mrs. Johnson) said "You know that old chest in the attic?"

"Yes?" said David (Mr. Johnson).

"Well," said Jane, "you know we didn't open it when we found it? Well, I tried it this afternoon, and do you know, it wouldn't open!"

"Locked . . . or stuck," said David, lighting a cigarette.

"Yes, but . . . Suppose there's something in it? Jewels or maybe . . ." she hesitated ". . . a body?"

"The trouble with you, darling," said David, settling back in his chair, "is that you read too many ghost stories. Look at the one you've got now! Spine-Chilling Stories! How can you think this house is haunted?"

"Oh, very well," said Jane, picking up a clip from the table.

"I didn't say I thought the house was haunted, but all the same, I do. There's a feeling in the air."

A scratching sound came from the door.

"What did I tell you!" shrieked Jane. "Don't open the door!" Crash went the cup onto the floor.

But Jack opened it slowly, revealing . . . Rover the dog, demanding to be taken for a walk.

In the now empty house, nothing stirred. Then . . . in the attic, the oak chest's lid moved. A green thread of matter trickled through the gap. It hung on the air, like a silken thread. Then it was joined by another, which melted into the first. The green matter solidified, and became an arm. It stretched itself, and then withdrew into the chest.

It had been hard work, holding the lid shut.

The door closed downstairs. Jane and David and Rover had returned. Rover, freed of his lead, went and laid on the hearth rug. Jane and David listened to some jazz and comedy programmes.

After the last one David said "I'm going to bed. How about you?"

"Yes," said Jane, "I think I will."

She had been in bed about half an hour when she heard something moving in the attic. She called sharply, "David, listen!" but only got "For heaven's sake let me get some sleep!" as a reply.



She called again, "David, wake up!" and finally he said "Well, what is it? Hear a skeleton knocking at the door?"

"No, but there's somebody in the attic," she answered.

"Humph. Well, what did you wake. . . . What did you say?" He listened. It was true; a creaking came from the room above . . . a sound like the lid of a chest lifting.

It only took him a little time to reach the attic door; he was hindered, however, by slipping on a . . . thing . . . which, he saw, was a cutting of garlic; and he realised there was one on most of the stairs leading up to the attic.

He wrenched open the door, found the attic in darkness. In the minute it took to find the light switch, he heard something moving about in the dark, and then heard the oak chest's lid slam down. By the time he had pulled the switch, the oak chest was shut; and everything was still.

The oak chest wouldn't open; he hadn't expected it to. He grunted and wrenched it for a few minutes, but it was firmly wedged . . . almost as though it was being held from the inside. . . . But he could do nothing. He went back to bed.

In the morning the milkman got no answer, even when he kicked the door. He looked in the front

window, then went and telephoned the police. . . .

In the hall lay the body of Rover the dog. The bodies of Mr. and Mrs. Johnson lay in their beds. In each case there were two tiny holes in the throat, and the bodies were bloodless hulks. . . .

"Did you know the previous owner committed suicide?" said the Inspector in charge to one of the constables. "I believe his body was stashed in an oak coffin."

"Suicides are supposed to become vampires," said the constable.

"Vampires indeed!" ejaculated the Inspector. "In this modern age. . . ."

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THE HOLLOW IN THE WOODS

I hate the dreadful hollow behind the little wood,
Its lips in the field above are dabbled with bloodred heath,
The red ribb'd hedges drip with a silent horror of blood,
And Echo there, whatever's asked her, answers "Death."

Tennyson

I

"Do you know any ghost stories?" said I, to my friend Hamilton.

"I know a supernatural story," he answered, "but it's not very nice. For one thing, it's true, and for another, it happened to me. Have you ever heard of a thing called a shoggoth?"

"No, never," I answered. "What is it?"

"Well, the best way to answer that is to tell you the whole story," Hamilton said. "So, if you're not squeamish, I'll begin." (I thought, rather absurdly, of Listen With Mother).

"It started," he began, "one day when I was walking in the woods with my sister. We were just talking and strolling along, when she slipped and nearly fell. We were on the edge of . . . the Hollow.

"There was a little white boulder at the bottom; at least, we thought it was a little white boulder. We were too young to know of . . . such things . . ." He shuddered violently.

"How old were you at the time?" I interrupted.

"Just turned eight, both of us,"

he shivered again and gave a low sob, "Mary and I. Poor . . . Mary . . ." He turned away and I saw his shoulders heaving.

"Something happened to her, then?" I asked sympathetically, using all the empathy I could muster. I had a nasty feeling that whatever that had happened was to do with the story and . . . what was the word? . . . shoggoths. It was a pity I'd started on this; if he was going to break down every few minutes, I wouldn't be able to piece it together. Then Hamilton turned his face back to me; his eyes were reddened, he said: "Look, do you mind if I go home? I'll see you tomorrow, and maybe I'll tell you the story."

"No, of course I don't mind, old boy," I assured him. "By the way, since you came, there's been a car crash on the road and there's a road block up. Bits of metal and glass everywhere . . . You'll have to go through the woods."

"N-not the woods!" Hamilton shrieked. "They—they—they're the woods I was telling you about! I can't go that way!"

"But it's the only way," I told him firmly. "You can't stay here. See you tomorrow."

"Very well," he said, suddenly calm. "See you tomorrow." He went to the door and let himself out. I watched him go towards the woods. As he reached them the trees seemed to close in on him . . .

"See you tomorrow," he had said. But the next morning his body was lying in the woods, close to a little hollow. His neck had been broken.

II

It made quite a sensation in the local paper. "Murder by person or persons unknown," was the verdict at the inquest. The person or persons remained unknown. But I wondered. Shoggoth?

I looked it up in the dictionary. Finally, I found it, tucked away in a corner. Shoggoth: evil spirit or demon in the shape of a tree with mouths scattered over its trunk. Could it break a man's neck? I thought it possible; now I knew the truth of what happened to Hamilton and his sister.

with the Hollow. And those things that he called Shoggoths. So I went into the woods one night. I've regretted it ever since, but now it's too late.

When I reached the Hollow I realised why Mary had tripped. There were long white sticks lying all round the little clearing in which the Hollow was. And in the Hollow two white boulders lay side by side, while near them lay more of the long white sticks. . . .

White sticks? Boulders?

I stared at them in horror. They lay there grinning up at me . . . human skulls! And the white sticks . . . the white sticks were human bones! The whole place was an open graveyard.

The trees were swaying as though in a wind. The branches were reaching for me, like skeleton hands . . . a shadow fell over the ground in front . . . a thing like a tree with mouths all over its trunk . . . its roots were snake-like tentacles that groped over the bones . . . the branches were reaching for my throat. . . . I fell into the Hollow and cracked my forehead against one of the skulls . . . I fell through a red, spinning void. . . .

III

At first, when I regained consciousness, I thought I'd gone blind. But then I realised that one of the skulls was lying on my face. I jumped up and threw the horrible thing away.

Then I saw Them. The shoggoths were crawling down the sides of the Hollow on three sides of me. The slimy things had puckered mouths over the branches. They were reaching for me. . . .

I sprinted up the fourth side of the Hollow, while the shoggoths mumbled and moaned and stretched their branches towards me. Then the others showed themselves. Two glowing green figures . . . Hamilton and his sister . . . standing by the shoggoths . . . beckoning with long skeleton fingers and calling, "Come, John! Come! Life

Of course, nobody will believe me, except Connor, one of the schizophrenic patients. And he doesn't count, because our doctor says he's one of the craziest patients in the asylum. . . .

Oh, all right. I'll get on with the story. Whoever you are, I don't know why you're listening to my story.

Anyway, I knew now that his death must have something to do



holds no attractions for you. You will be happy with us. Come to us!" But I ran away from the evil place in the woods, and I never went back. But (now I know, for I made inquiries in the village) many people went through the woods and were never seen again. The woods are evil . . . the shoggoths live there, and they are over-running the earth. They are spirits, but they can be captured and killed, by certain rituals and exorcisms, that will be found in some grimoires.

But I am digressing. Two weeks later, I was more or less normal, and I fell in love with a girl. Three months later I married her. And one night, someone 'phoned her up and asked her to meet him in the woods. I didn't know where she'd gone until I found a note on the kitchen table. I tried to bring her back; but I seemed to be running in circles, and the next morning I still hadn't found her.



I never found her.

That was when I had a nervous breakdown; finally my doctor gave up hope and sent me off to an asylum. And, even now, in the asylum, Mary Hamilton and her brother come to me in the night. Nobody can see them except me; the doctors say my case is hopeless, and I'm happier here than I could ever be, in the outer



world, with all its memories. But you, whoever you are, can kill the shoggoths. Go into any wood and you will find. . . .

Here the journal of this patient ends. He disappeared from the asylum last night; one of the walls was smashed in and tree branches were found scattered around his cell. His disappearance has not yet been accounted for; it is just another strange problem that will never be solved.



NEW GRUE

The fifth issue of *Grue* magazine is now available for \$4.00 from Hell's Kitchen Productions, P. O. Box 370, Times Square Station, New York, NY 10108. The editorial team of Peggy Nadramia, Peter H. Gilmore, and Lori Katz have done another fine job of assembling fiction, poetry, and art by many leading talents in the world of contemporary small press horror. For example, you will find tales by Steve Rasnic Tem, David B. Silva, Joe Lansdale, Wayne Allen Sallee, and Thomas Ligotti, a favorite among *Crypt* readers.



THINGS

FROM THE SEA



When I, and my friend Hartley, met the creature that called itself Ennis, we thought it was human. I was taking Hartley out in my motor-boat, and we came across one of those small rocks that jut out of the sea. We found Ennis hanging on to it, and screaming in a horrible high-pitched voice. The waves were smashing against him. His eyes . . . they were bright green . . . were dilated.

We pulled him off the rock and laid him on the bottom of the boat. I started up the motor; the vibration woke him, and he jumped up. As the rays of the setting sun drew a red path across the water, he shrieked into the swirling liquid "Ki! Zora nozak!" I could have sworn that a thin red hand rose out of the water and then fell back, as though the owner was exhausted. But, of course, I told myself it was a fish.

I took Ennis home, where he promptly went to sleep on the sofa.

(I knew his address, as he had it in his wallet.) He woke up as I was leaving, and asked me to stay the night. I accepted.

In the morning, he asked me to stay for breakfast. Again I accepted—then quickly refused when I saw what it was that he expected me to eat. Raw meat, running with rivulets of fresh blood. And the drinks were of a red liquid. It looked suspiciously like blood—blood of an animal; but I had a horrifying feeling that it was human blood. And the raw meat. . . .

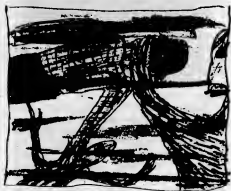
Ennis raised his eyebrows when I refused. "Raw meat is very good for you," he said. A huge, bloated spider fell from the ceiling on a silken thread and alighted on the plate of raw meat that Ennis had set out for me. "If you will not eat your meat, then Spider will eat it," he said. He picked up a fly that had landed on the table, and gave the fly to the Spider.

I ran out of that terrible place

as fast as my legs would carry me. I looked back once; Ennis was pointing his finger at me and cackling, while his horrible pet sat on the meat and sucked at the fly. . . . I bumped into an old man. "Where have you been?" he asked. "At Ennis's place," I said. "What, him with the four wives?" remarked the old man. "Four wives," I gasped. "Yes; they all disappeared," he answered. "The fourth went only two days ago." I leant against the wall for support, a sickening idea had crept into my mind about the raw meat.

I only saw Ennis once more; I was out again, in my motor-boat with Hartley. We were just coming to the rock where we saw Ennis first, when Hartley said, "You know Ennis yelled Ki zora nozak when he was with us last time. Well, it's Egyptian, and it means I will bring more meat. What do you think he meant?"

That was when I told Hartley the whole story (he had gone to his own house when I took Ennis home). Then the rock came into view. Ennis was standing on it, throwing pieces of flesh to . . . something in the water. He threw the last piece, and I saw, all round the rock, sharks eating the flesh . . . flesh from the body of his fourth wife.



"Help!" he shouted, as he saw my boat. "Get me off here!"

"Stay there, you . . . you ghoul!" shouted Hartley before he could say any more. Then he (Hartley) shrieked, "John, look out! The sharks are trying to tear bits off our boat! We must distract them!" Then he took a gun from his pocket and said "I won't regret this," and shot Ennis. The sharks made short work of his body.

But I have a feeling that the affair is not over yet. Before I went to sleep at Ennis's house that night, he gave me a drink of a red liquid. I didn't recognise its taste or smell, but I have a nasty feeling that I know what it was.

Since then, I can never bring myself to kill a spider. And I've developed an unnatural craving for raw meat.



THINGS FROM THE SEA

R'LYEH REVIEW

(continued from page 47)

be commended for giving only a discreet back cover mention of Bloch's earlier notoriety that most publishers prefer to emblazon across the front cover. It shows an unusual respect for both the author's talent and his readers' tastes.



THE GRAVE IN THE DESERT

Reynolds was walking in the desert when he found it. It was a grave. A mound of sand with a wooden cross on top of it. The sun was low in the west, and the cross cast a shadow over the sand.

"I wonder whose grave it is?" he mused. "I wonder whether—"

He was wondering if anything valuable had been buried with the body. That was the case sometimes, he knew. Gold or jewels, maybe, or money in a box. He had cause to know, for he had robbed quite a few graves.

He pulled the cross off the top and had a good look at it. Nothing valuable about that, anyway. He began to dig at the mound with his hands, for he was hardened. A boy had once seen him digging up a grave, and Reynolds had tried to make him an apprentice, but the boy threatened to tell the police, and so Reynolds had had to silence him. (He'd put him in the place occupied before by the original body.)

He worked for ten minutes . . . and then uncovered a box. He broke it open, and saw . . . jewels! Emeralds, rubies sparkled and glistened in the setting sun; a stone as big as a man's head winked at him like a huge blue eye. He stood looking at them, entranced . . . when he heard a slight move-

ment behind him and a hand touched him on the shoulder. . . .

He turned. A decaying body was standing with both hands stretched towards him. An echoing voice that seemed to come from under ground said "Come to me! Come to guard my jewels!" He tried to run, but some invisible force was dragging him towards the horrible Thing . . . a sand cloud blew into his eyes and he staggered about blindly . . . he fell into the open grave and the soil closed over his head. . . .

The Thing stood by the grave. Soon Reynolds would rise again and guard his jewels. He dug himself a grave and lay down in it. Sand blew over the hole and covered him. . . .

The power of the Un-Dead is greater than we know. . . .





ACCIDENT

As Jim Organ reached a corner of the lonely cliff road, he saw the patch of oil that lay directly in his path. The car skidded and crashed into the railings. There was a snap, and the car screamed over the edge. It fell forty feet.

Organ saw himself lying in the debris, a look of horror frozen on his face. Then a luminous cloud floated down from the sky, and he was gently but firmly urged into the middle of it. Then it rose again; he saw the remains of the car lying on a brown strip of road, and the countryside spread out around it; he stared at a tree that had fallen across a road, just as the cloud sped into the darkness of outer space.

"Well, Mr. Organ," said Saint Peter, "I have been through your record, and I have decided that you definitely belong here, in Heaven. I will take you to your section of Heaven. Follow me." Organ was taken to a beautiful garden, a garden that surpassed all earthly beauty, and left to do whatever he wanted.

There is no such thing as Time in Heaven, so Jim did not know how long had passed since he had died. But suddenly a black cloud came down into his garden, he was dragged towards it, and soon it enveloped him. It leapt upwards; once again he passed through the

blackness of space, and then fell through the Earth's atmosphere, towards a large white building. In fact, a hospital.

"Where am I?" Organ groaned.

"In a hospital," said a doctor, standing by his bed. "You've been almost dead for three days, but I pulled you through."

Organ never told anyone why he picked up a bottle of medicine and hit the doctor over the head with it.





The Friend

I was sitting in a cafe reading a paper, when the man came and sat down by me. He had been in the inn next door, so I expected him to be a little drunk, but he was cold sober. The wind was howling outside like an animal in mortal agony, and the rain had been pouring down for at least half an hour.

"Did you ever have a really good friend, one that never left your side?" said the man.

"A dog, you mean?" I suggested.

"A human," he said, and relapsed into silence. The rain poured, and there came a faint rumble of thunder. Somewhere out in the darkness a dog howled. A teenage couple got up from their table, and went out into the teeming rain.

"I had a good friend once," came the man's voice. "His name was Frank—Frank Swann. I met him one night at this cafe, and took a liking to him as soon as I saw him. Well, I'd seen him before at shows and places like that, but this was the first time I'd spoken to him."

A flash of lightning lit up the scene outside. Two men were making their way, rather unsteadily,

down the street, while they sang something about the loyalty of pals. It didn't need a detective to tell where they'd been.

"He owned a small shop," the man continued, "and he offered to let me go into partnership with him, as I was looking for a job.

"Things went well for the first few weeks, and then something cropped up that we didn't see eye to eye about. I wanted to do one thing, Frank wanted another. We had a hell of a row, and he roared off home in a raging temper. The next morning I learned that a motor-car had knocked him down and killed him.

"The shop had been left to me in his will, and I did what I wanted about the affair I mentioned. But that night, as I went home through a field, Frank met me with a gun in his hand. He said 'Now we'll always be together' and shot me."

"But you're not dead!" I shouted. Getting no answer, I turned. . . . The chair next to me was empty.

I called a waiter. "Where did the man go who was sitting here?"

"You've been alone all night," he said.



The Devil's Cart

The wind shrieked louder outside the narrow window of the highest room in the castle. Count Slāvus, the Scandinavian lord, had before him the Great Book, the Black Grimore. He was reading it in pitch darkness, for it was the third section, the section written in luminous ink on black paper.

" . . . take one eye, cut fresh from a black cat, and place in the centre of the second pentacle; then stand in centre of first pentacle and repeat incantation. You should then. . . ."

A knocking on the door of the castle room made him start, and nearly drop the precious book; he pushed it inside an oak box and locked it. He called "Who's there?"

"It's me, Lord, only your loyal Wulf!" came a voice. Slāvus opened the door. "Yes? What do you want this time?"

"'Tis Martha, the old peasant woman, that would speak with you!" answered Wulf. Martha was the worst nuisance, according to the Count, in Scandinavia. He had taken steps to have her eliminated.

"Oh, bring her up to me," said the Count. "I suppose I must hear her groans. Oh— have you any cats in the castle? Black cats preferably?"

"I have none," answered Wulf. "But Martha gets more hysterical

every minute. I will go and fetch her."

"Hysterical?" repeated Count Slāvus. "You mean something has frightened her?"

"Something very evil, Lord," said Wulf in a hushed voice. "But she will not tell me what it was . . . she said she would only tell you."

"I was walking along the road to the castle," began Martha when she had recovered from her hysteria, "when I saw a cart coming along behind me. I stepped out of the road . . . when I saw the horses that were pulling it."

"What was wrong with them?" asked Count Slāvus. Not that he wanted to know, but it seemed the only thing to say.

"Their eyes were like burning pits, and the horses had wings growing out of their backs! But the d-driver . . . the driver, he was a skeleton! His eyes were like two openings into hell, and when he saw me he cracked his whip and cried, 'To Slāvus Castle! Let us take that servant of the Evil One to Hell!' Oh, Lord, it is your dabbings in black magic and satanism that have brought this doom upon your soul! For your own sake, repent while you can, Count Slāvus. Your end is near!"

Count Slāvus spat. "Interfering



wretch of a peasant woman!" he roared. "Meddling with things that you do not understand! I will teach you to keep your skinny hands out of my affairs!" He called out of the doorway, "Franz! Karl!"

Two guards stumped in through the doorway. "Yes, Lord? What is your wish?"

"Throw this woman from the window!" shrieked the frenzied Count.

"No! Have mercy on me!" screamed Martha; but it didn't matter how loud she screamed. The two men dragged her, screaming, fighting and pleading, to the window, and pushed her out. A horrible shriek, followed by a dull thud, resounded through the silent country.

A silence followed, only to be broken by the sound of horses' hooves on the drawbridge. Then Slávus heard slow, heavy footsteps coming up the staircase.

"Who is it?" he called. "Who is it?" There was no reply, except for an insane giggle. The footsteps came nearer . . . nearer . . . nearer . . .

With a hysterical scream the Count rushed over to the door, and slammed and double-locked it. The

footsteps came across the landing. Then something crashed against the door, as though a giant's fist was pounding it. Then the lock gave way; the door banged open, and the afore-mentioned skeleton rushed in. Without wavering he caught Slávus round the throat with his bony fingers and bore him off. The legend says that, as the Count was thrown in the cart, a lightning bolt hit it, and it disappeared completely.

A railway runs on the track that used to lead to the castle; and passengers on the midnight train sometimes see two figures glowing at the side of the track; a man and a skeleton.



THE DEVIL'S CART

ASTRO-ADVENTURES #2

Yes, the intergalactic freighter has just pulled in and unloaded a good stock of copies of *Astro-Adventures* #2, which includes "Corsairs of the Cosmos" by Lin Carter, "The Other Place" by Richard L. Tierney, "The Eyes of Thar" by Henry Kuttner, plus satire, criticism, letters, and a Stephen E. Fabian cover! \$4.50

Tem Bashish



Two brothers climbed Tem Basish,
The story said:
Two brothers climbed Tem Basish,
But one was dead.

So ran the old rhyme. Tem Basish is a mountain, as you have guessed; and the rhyme is a kind of warning to any unwary climber who might want to climb Tem Bashish.

I was staying in the old village of Borak'esh, and as soon as I saw Tem Basish I felt the climber's urge creeping over me. Once I see a mountain that I haven't climbed I take its presence as a challenge that I must answer.

When I first saw Tem Basish it was an awe-inspiring sight. Its twin peaks towered up towards the sky, and in between the peaks the sun was setting, giving a blood-red tint to the sky. I resolved to ask the keeper of the inn where I was staying, to tell me all that he knew about Tem Basish. I knew that some legend about the mountain was told in the village, and I wanted to know the whole story.

Unfortunately, none of the villagers knew English, but luckily I knew all the words, including unprintable ones, in their language; so I have written all speech translated into English.

"Well," began the inn-keeper, "there were two brothers who lived in Borak'esh about fifty years ago.

Their names were Tem and Basish, and all their lives they had wanted to climb the mountain.

"It is a rule in Borak'esh that a mountain has no name until someone has climbed to the top. So the two brothers set out one day and said 'As the mountain is unnamed, we will climb it together, and reach the top at the same time, so shall the mountain be named Tem Basish.'

"So one brother climbed one peak, and the other climbed the other peak, and as had been prophesied, they reached their goals at the same time, so the mountain was named Tem Basish.

"Now the brothers grew jealous over something, the legend does not tell what. But the next time they climbed Tem Bashish, only one returned. That one was Tem. They searched for the other's body high and low, but they never found it.

"Tem climbed the mountain alone a few days later, and he never returned. His pick was found in the rock about half way up. His body was found at the bottom of the mountain. A clump of bushes had broken his fall, and the body was still recognizable. He had not just fallen, he had been murdered."

"How on earth did you know that?" I asked.

"Because of the finger-marks round his throat, where he'd been choked to death," he answered.

However, this did not scare me, and I resolved to scale Tem Basish the next day, alone. I collected my tools, and started out for the right-hand peak.

At the bottom, as I stared up the rocky sides of Tem Basish, I noticed something protruding from the rock. Then, giving it no more thought, I started to climb.

About half-way up I saw what it was. It was nothing more than a pick. Then it was that I remembered what the old inn-keeper had told me . . . "They found his pick about half-way up." Of course, I thought that they had left it where it was . . . as a sort of memorial, maybe. I never thought of the supernatural, for I did not then believe in ghosts.



Then I hit an area of hard rock. It took me four hours to climb it, and by then the sun was setting. So I made for a cave that lay near me, like a gaping mouth. I had brought a torch, luckily, and when I was into the cave I shone it round.

That was when I discovered that there was more than just rock in the cave. There was more. Something much worse.

To be precise, a human skull.

Being trapped in a cave one hundred feet up, with nothing for company except a grinning skull, is not a position recommended for retaining your sanity; but I am sure that they were real.

They were dim, shadowy figures, that appeared at the cave entrance. Echoing words floated to me, as I crouched shivering in a corner of the cave. Words with a sinister meaning, words that were not for mortals to hear: "I will reach the peak, then I can rest in peace" . . . "I will hurl you down from my mountain, then my spirit can rest". . . . There was the sound of fighting, curses; the ethereal figures were struggling, one was being forced nearer and nearer to the edge. . . .

I could stand it no longer. I screamed and ran towards the two figures of Tem and Basish, who had been dead for fifty long years. They vanished and I found myself falling down, down. . . .



Basish's skull still lies in the cave where Tem had put it after he had murdered his brother. Tem's pick has moved two-thirds of the way up the mountain. But I don't think it's fair; I have to fight two people while I try to haunt this damn' mountain.





The Whirlpool

Tom Bart, the man who had murdered six people, waited by the whirlpool in the woods for another victim. This whirlpool had claimed the bodies of all his victims as soon as he had taken everything that could be of any possible use to him. But it had been said to him, by an old man who he had met out in Egypt, "For some people seven is a lucky number, but to you it will be unlucky."

He waited a long time in the woods, a very long time. He fancied footsteps that came through the woods, but if he really heard them, they remained as footsteps. Finally he tramped off home, feeling very disgruntled.

As he climbed into bed he thought of all his victims: John Kissane, a middle-aged commercial traveller; David McBryde, a young gamekeeper; Sid Latham, a pork butcher; Eric Laird, a tourist; Mike Shea, a local trumpet-player who had been thrown out of Johnny

Dankworth's band, and Ray Murphy, an amateur author. All rotting away somewhere deep down in the whirlpool.

Then he shut his eyes and started to sink down in a humming void. . . . Somewhere in his mind formed a bizarre pattern, and he dreamed.

He was in the middle of a huge, featureless plain; it was lifeless there was nobody there but himself. Then he saw faces, faces floating in the air; they were all his victims . . . one, two . . . five, six, seven! Whose was the seventh face? It was vaguely familiar.

The mouths chanted in unison, "Come! Come with us!" He could not resist, he did not want to resist, so he followed the strange beings.

The ground felt rough, although he knew it was flat. Then the faces began to move faster, and he ran after them. Once he tripped, but saved himself by catching hold of something which wasn't there. . .



Suddenly he woke, and the full horror of the situation was borne in to him. . . . In his sleep he had walked straight into the whirlpool! And as the water closed over

MAIL-CALL (continued from p. 52)

it. It was a total scream. Cats torture mice prior to eating them . . . cosmically frightening? No. So shoggoths like humans to be horrified . . . same type of thing. At least with Deep Ones you get into espionage, mind exchange, cloning. Deep Ones are intelligent enemies. Shoggoths are dumb and brutal . . . like sharks. For cosmic horror beyond anything HPL wrote: read Bastienne's two stories in Cthulhu Codex 1 and 2. If the plebeian mind can fathom what Bastienne is saying, the plebeian will be numbed with horror . . . unfortunately most plebeians will never understand those two stories.

How about breeding shoggoths and then genetically infusing them into Patti so that she can . . . or have the shoggoth akin to virus material or having half of a DNA like AIDS has . . . and an RNA (memory . . . etc.) infusing the RNA gives Patti the memory of, etc. Wagner says Shea is not playing for laughs . . . the story was funny.

--Tani Jantsang
Newquay, England

his head, he remembered who the seventh face in his dream had belonged to.

It had been his own.



Issue 47 of Crypt was one of the best I've received for awhile. "The Pool" was interesting, even apart from the actual story. The introduction was almost like an original Lovecraft story; a scholar receives an age-old yellowed manuscript. . . . Seriously, the revision was well-written and contained a good deal of atmosphere. The climax built up to a (if not unexpected) satisfying climax.

Lin Carter's "Behind the Mask" succeeded in creating a pleasing story and it was enlightening to hear about the "hobbies" of the Miskatonic library staff!

"Soul Proprietor" by Robert Bloch proved to be probably the best story in the issue (although I did like "The Fantasy and Mystery Bookshop" by Peter H. Cannon). Bloch's style is obvious and the "twists" at the end are always vivid, mostly darkly humorous and most of the time unexpected.

Robert E. Howard's "The Mark of a Bloody Hand" made a nice change from the usual Mythos stories you print. Howard's work holds the reader and are always (continued on page 40)



THE WHISPERING HORROR

This is a story of the lengths that a woman may go to if her husband is unfaithful. But this woman was different from other women, for she had strange powers, and knew things that it is not given to many to know. For instance, she could change. . . . But this is not a list of all the things she could do, but the story of one thing that she did.

Even though she was not beautiful, she had married a man called Victor Sloane. Her maiden name (she was a foreigner) was Puol Eripmav.

But after three years of marriage, he tired of her. There was a young woman in the next street, and soon he started to take her out any time he thought his wife wouldn't notice.

Finally she found out, and she resolved, in her white-hot fury, to use her black-magic powers to get

her revenge.

That night, as Victor got into bed, he heard his wife muttering something outside his bedroom door. He thought he heard another voice answer, but wasn't sure, so he took no notice.

She had certainly been mad at him today, he thought. Oh well, she'd get over it. His head touched the pillow and soon he was asleep.

He woke up, with the feeling there was something in the room. It was the middle of the night, and it was pitch dark. It took him a few minutes to get used to the blackness, but when his eyes were in focus he saw a Thing lying on the bed beside him.

If it was like any earthly creature, it was like a spider; but it had many more legs than a spider. . . about twenty, in fact.

He tried to scream, but the Horror wouldn't let him. A whispering voice in his mind said, "If you scream you will wake everybody in the house. You wouldn't want to do that, it wouldn't be right, would it?"

I must be going mad, he thought numbly. But when he heard the next words of the Thing . . . for he was sure that it was the Thing that was speaking . . . when he heard the next words of the Thing he felt a dull edge of horror go down his spine.

For the Thing was saying: "It is nice to be dead. Why don't you commit suicide?" But Victor did not answer, he had fainted.

When he came round it was only to hear the Horror's inexorable "It is good to be dead. Why don't you commit suicide?"

And suddenly he knew he must. With slow, heavy footsteps he walked over to the window and pushed up the sash; he stood on the ledge, poised himself. . . .

Then, quite suddenly and without any warning, like a clarion call, a cock crowed. The Horror gave a low cry of anger, and vanished as though it had never been.

Victor came out of his trance with a start. Where was he? What on earth was he doing on the window-sill? One slip and he would have plunged down to a horrible death. He pictured himself lying, like a broken doll, his head a splash of brains and blood. He thought about it in more detail, and was nearly sick.

That night, Puol was speaking to her familiar. It was getting restless and hungry. "I must feed soon," it said, "and you know I can only eat somebody who has been killed by a human, or one who has committed suicide. I must feed tonight!"

As before, Victor woke up only to find the Horror lying on the bed beside him. Also as before, the Horror started to discourse on the happiness and marvels of being a dead soul, and once again he felt



unconsciousness creeping over him.

The Thing knew that if Victor fainted, it would go hungry for another night. That it could not bear. So it did the only thing that it could think of to do; treacherous, of course, but the Thing had no human feelings or emotions, except greed.

It told him the whole truth.

It told him about his wife's powers, and her jealousy of the girl on the next street; the jealousy that had made her try to kill him by the dreadful use of black magic. And he listened, and his face became grim and purposeful.

Puol was standing before a mirror, sharpening her nails, when the door opened and Victor entered. He moved towards her, his eyes were glazed and staring.

"Your familiar came to me tonight," he said. "Somebody's going to be killed tonight."

"Oh?" she said sleepily. "Who?"

"You," he said, putting his hands round her throat.

On the day of Victor Sloane's execution, they found him dead in his cell. Like his wife, his body had been gnawed in many places. When the warder entered the cell, he thought he saw a huge spider sliding through the window. At the inquest, the verdict on Victor was that he must have, for some reason, decayed quicker than other dead bodies.

Only two people knew the truth.



-I-

Come at once. I am in a horrible trap.

Frank.

That was all. Just ten words. All that was in the letter that I read over a cup of coffee. I am a private psychic investigator, and in my profession I naturally get a large number of cranks, one or two psychiatric patients and quite a few practical jokes. But the writer of the letter was a personal friend of mine; he was none of the things I've mentioned, except possibly the latter. That was why I left everything just as it was, and drove as fast as I could to my friend's country home.

I had to ask the way to his home, which was called Bradmoor. The only person I could find to ask was an old man who was smoking a clay pipe that was not a thing to go into ecstasies about. The fumes that came from it made me think twice about the methods that farmers use to dispose of surplus pig swill. Something like that must have been in that pipe.

Anyway, I asked him how to get to Bradmoor, and he said, "Bradmoor? Ar, the man there be right snappy. Don't you go there, sir. Ar." And he blew out a cloud of dense smoke.

BRAD- MOOR

But I told him that I was Frank's friend, and after muttering something about "you will find him different" and blowing out a cloud that lingered in the air and insinuated itself into my throat, he gave me instructions that I could just barely follow.

At last I saw the house. It was partly hidden by clumps of trees that grew haphazardly around it, but on the iron gate outside the drive I read the letters, partly obliterated, "B AD OOR."

Above me the clouds ran across the purple sky in a macabre ballet. I drove my sports car up the drive. At the top I alighted, then walked into the old wooden porch and crashed the iron knocker against the door.

Hesitating footsteps approached the door. Then it opened. A man stood there; his eyes had dark rings under them. I said "Is Mr. Bardell in?"

That was my friend's other name. It was my first shock that night, as I felt a vague edge of horror trace itself down my spine.

The man was Frank Bardell.

-II-

A roaring fire in the grate, the flames fanned by the wind howling down the chimney. Rain battered against the window; and outside,

trees, like vague, phantom figures, were swept up and backwards by the force of the gale. Frank and I sat on either side of the hearth. The vague edge of horror that I had felt after meeting Frank that night had not disappeared; on the contrary, it had grown, for there was something very evil about the old house, and I had a feeling a lot of it emanated [sic] from Frank himself. However, I hid my feelings as best I could, and finally asked Frank: "Is this . . . trap that you mentioned a supernatural one?"

He looked into the fire, seeming to see something there, something more than the leaping flames. His eyes swivelled towards me, and he said, "I don't know what it is. I only know that it is here now, and I'm afraid of it."

"Have you ever heard anything?—Seen anything?—Felt anything?"

"I've been hearing something moving about for a few weeks now," he answered. "First I started to hear something bumping down the old disused stairway . . . there is one, it leads to the cellar . . . but when I investigated, I saw that nothing lit up the stairs, so I couldn't see anything."

"Then I started hearing the voices. I never heard the words they said, but I knew that they were voices . . . of men and women, it sounded like a whole crowd of them."

"I see," I said. "And what do you expect me to do about it?"

He thought I was joking at first, but after going ha-ha and seeing that I still looked as serious as before, he stuttered, "Y-you are a psy-psyhic investigator, aren't you?"

"I am," I said. "But I can refuse my services, can't I? You know, 'the company reserves the right,' and all that. And I'd like to keep out of this affair. On second thoughts, though I'd like to stay the night here, and when the noises start, I'll go and investigate. If you don't mind, that is."

"Of course I don't mind!" he exclaimed. "That's why I wrote to



BRADMOOR

you! I'll put you up in the bedroom next to mine."

"By the way," I said, "are you sure there's nothing more to tell? Nothing that could be connected even remotely with the haunting? Did anyone ever swear that after death they'd return to haunt you, or anything like that?"

"No, never," he said. Then, suddenly, he turned towards the window. Rain still battered against it. The trees still twisted themselves into weird shapes, but they were not the only things that Frank Bardell saw out in the darkness.

He fell back in his chair with a gurgle of terror. I ran to the window, but all I could see were trees in bizarre shapes. Then, for an instant, I thought I saw a man standing in the grounds; he was naked, and there was something else about him that I could not place. Then I turned to Frank, and when I looked back the figure had gone.

-III-

The wind howled and rattled the window of the bedroom. I lay awake in bed and listened for . . . any sounds that might be footsteps and voices. But nothing came except the wind and rain.

"Heard anything yet?" came Frank's voice through the connect-

ing doorway.

"No, not yet," I called back.

"Neither have I."

The hooting of an owl came from somewhere outside. The window rattled, and then . . . and then there came the slam of a door somewhere downstairs. Leaping out of bed, I hesitated briefly to grab my gun, loaded with silver bullets, and yell "Come on! it's here!" to Frank, then I started off across the landing.

The staircase was dark, pitch dark, so I had to hold the banister until I got my torch out, wasting precious minutes. But I ran as fast as I could, the torch's light wavering through the darkness. Frank was close on my heels.

Now I could hear the sound of voices and footsteps clearly. We burst into the kitchen, for that was where the top of the disused staircase was located.

The opening to the staircase gazed at us like a hollow eye-socket of a skull. I shone the torch down the steps, but it was a winding stairway, and I saw nothing more than a wall. So I started down the stairs. Frank was still on my tail.

The voices had stopped, except for one, a high-pitched voice. Down and down the stairs we went, and the high-pitched voice yammered on and on. We started running faster and faster. . . . And then, quite unexpectedly the stairs finished. There was nothing more except a ten foot drop. I pitched forward into space. A last glance back showed me that Frank, too, had been unable to stop. Then I hit the ground and spun into oblivion. . . .

-IV-

When I came round I found that my arms and legs were chained to the floor. Twisting my head, I saw Frank in a similar plight. He, too, was conscious.

"Is this a cellar?" I asked him.

"I can't make head or tail of it," he said, obviously shaken. "This

isn't the cellar that I saw when I came down the stairs last. Where on earth are we?"

Then I remembered something that I had meant to ask him. I said, "What did you see in the garden last night that frightened you so badly? I saw a naked man."

"So did I," he answered, "but there's something. . . . Look, we're going to be here for quite a long time, by the looks of things, so do you mind if I bore you with a story?"

"Not at all," I said. "Go ahead and bore me."

"Well, in my first year at college," he began, "(I was at Cambridge, you know) I found myself short of money, and I needed ten pounds to pay off an urgent debt.

"I scouted round the college, and finally met a student, who called himself de Ville. He said he was willing to give me the ten pounds, on condition that I did something for him.

"Of course, I said, 'What is it?' whereupon he produced a scrap of paper and a pen, and wrote something on the paper. Then he passed them to me. 'There,' he said, 'sign that.'

"It was quite simple; seven words, but oh God, the terrible meaning of those words.

"It said: I sell my soul for ten pounds.

"I looked at the paper, then at de Ville. I read the paper again, then turned it over to make sure I hadn't missed anything. I felt de Ville's eyes on me . . . he had coal-black eyes, you know . . . then he said 'Well? Will you sign it?'

"I looked at it again, and at the two five-pound notes that he held ready in his hand, then I picked up the paper and pen and signed it, and gave it to him, receiving the money in exchange.

"That, I thought, was the end of it. But now I'm not so sure. That man that we both saw in the garden is de Ville! I have a horrible feeling about this."

I must have been pale; I know I



felt ghastly. Now I knew why I felt that vague horror when I had met him, and now I knew where the evil that emanated from him had its source. It was because Frank Bardell had no soul!

-V-

"Is there no way I can regain my soul?" he shrieked in horror.

"There are two," I said. "You can confess what you have done, to a Roman Catholic priest, then somehow get hold of the document that you signed and burn it in the presence of the same priest."

He didn't take to that one, so I told him the other. "You have to get hold of the sum of money . . . ten pounds, in your case . . . and sit with it, in a pentacle, repeating over and over 'I buy back my soul for ten pounds.'" Then gloomily, "if we ever get out of here, that is."

"Look!" he said, feeling in his pocket. "A file! I was going to file the lock off a cupboard door that had stuck, but I never thought it would come in this useful!" He bent down and began to file away frantically.

Soon he had freed both himself

and me. We started for the stairs . . . when a wall of flame rose up before us. But I said "Quick! Follow me!" to Frank, and ran straight for the fire, and saying the Lord's Prayer as loud as I could, while I ran.

The flames hissed and went out. But in their place, sitting on the floor not a foot from me, was a huge toad. I say it was a toad, for that is the creature it resembled most, but in reality it was not like any creature that lived on the earth. It passed its tongue across its lips, if they were lips, and stared at Frank and me with unblinking, lidless eyes. It had a slimy skin that had decomposed in parts, revealing the raw red flesh beneath. I have never seen anything more filthy or obscene than that Thing.

To reach the stairs, we had to pass the Thing. Wondering if it was invulnerable, I fired the gun with the silver bullets at it. There was a dull plop as the bullet struck. But the Thing just looked at it, languidly picked it out with a front paw, spat on it, and pitched it back at me. Then it laughed . . . a harsh, grating laugh, that echoed through the great hall.

The Lord's Prayer resounded in the hall as I advanced, hands outstretched, towards the Thing. When my hands were nearly touching the Thing's face, it gave a scream of terror and vanished. We kept on towards the stairs, when suddenly a low, pleasant, persuasive voice called "Do you want that document? I have it here; come and take it back."

I gasped out "Don't look, Frank! He's trying to trap you! Don't look at his eyes!" But it was too late; Frank was walking towards a figure that I recognised as de Ville, the naked man who had been in the grounds of Bradmoor, and I also saw what had been wrong with him; he didn't cast a shadow.

There is a word that will overcome all evil; it is not known to many, but luckily I am one of the



few. One of the many queer, psychic people that I met in my job, was a Magister Templi; in fact, an Ipsimuss [sic]. He told me in strict confidence, the Word; in case I should meet anything really evil. It has five syllables, and it fell through my lips like a liquid stream. I cannot divulge the Word.

For a minute a blue light seemed to flicker round my fingers, then it started to extend towards de Ville. He saw it, and with a thwarted scream, he disappeared.

Frank came out of his trance with a start, and we ran for the stairs. We had only covered about twenty steps, when we came into a cellar. Now we knew why Frank had not known of the existence of the place under his house.

Then Frank whispered: "Listen!" But he had not needed to tell me; I could hear as well as he could. A sound like a wet rag being dragged up the steps, and a cackling laugh floated up to us. I saw a dark shape on the stairs, coming quickly upwards and leaving a trail of green slime in its wake. The thing looked like a rotting toad, maybe the same thing that I had tried to banish. This time I used the Word, and it dissolved in a flash of flame. All that was left was a pool of green slime.

Nothing more followed us, and

the house stayed silent. We went to bed and locked all the doors behind us.

-VI-

The next morning I went down to the village to buy some chalk, ignoring the urgent beseechings of Frank that if he left the house de Ville would probably destroy it, and if he didn't de Ville would kill him; but I assured him that no evil thing, even de Ville, would have power in the daytime. So, finally, and after much argument, he let me go.

When I returned I found him lying on a settee, with his face white as a corpse's. When I asked him what the matter was, he answered, "I've been trying to say the Lord's Prayer for about half-an-hour, but I can't do it! Listen:

"Our Father, who art in . . ." But further than that he could not go. For the first time I felt pity rather than revulsion for this man who had no soul.

"The part I find most horrible," said Frank, "is that I can say it backwards! Has that . . . does it make it any worse?" By my expression he saw that it did. Again, I must have looked ghastly. The Lord's Prayer spoken backwards, the worst denial of the belief in God that a man can give. De Ville had certainly had his way with this man's soul, though, of course, Frank may have been laid open to Hell, for I did not, then or now, know what kind of thing he may have practiced in later life.

"I can see that it does," he said brokenly. "But anyway, have you got the thing that you went out for?"

"I have," I answered. "But we must wait until tonight. . . ." Then, suddenly, a horrible realisation struck me. I ran to a calendar that was tacked on the wall, and looked up the date. Then, to be sure, I found it in my diary. It was true. Both gave the same date, and the dreadful truth broke in upon me.

Tonight was Walpurgis Night!

-VII-

I stood stock still, not moving an eyelid as I realised the truth. Tonight was Walpurgis Night, the night of the year when, according to old grimoires and legends, everything evil was let loose to roam the earth and do as it pleased. And I knew what that meant. It would be the best night for Frank to regain his soul, but all evil would be let free to fight him. It would be abnormally easy, however, for Frank to reach his soul, for, according to popular belief, all unattached souls were also let from their prison to walk in the world. All this I told to Frank, and his face grew into a mask of worry.

"I'll carry the ritual through," he said finally. "You admitted that tonight is the night when I'm most likely to regain my soul, and nothing you say will keep me from practicing the ceremony."

"Very well," said I. "And as I have enough equipment to construct two pentacles, I will stay this night with you. But tomorrow, whether or not your soul has regained its body, I will leave Bradmoor, and nothing that you say will prevent me from doing so. And I should advise you to do likewise; if you do leave, or stay for that matter, promise me that you will have that stairway walled up. If you do not promise, I will destroy all the equipment that I have brought, and then you will not regain your soul. Do you promise?"

"I promise," he said, and I could see that he meant it. "By the name of . . . by the name. . . ." But he could say no more. But he knew that it would be in his interests to promise.

Then I saw something that made my blood run cold. Pressed against the window, so hard that it looked like a flat mask, was a face. I didn't need a second look to see that it was that of de Ville. But what made my hair stand on end was not the face itself, even



though it was decayed and bloated with evil. No, it was not just the face. Straight above the pointed ears were two horns, growing out and up. . . .

The sheer horror of the thing, the blatant revelation, was just too much for Frank. This time he didn't even gurgle, but keeled over and slumped to the floor.

I went to get some water to bring him round. As I crossed the hall with a cup of water, I heard the window open stealthily in the room where Frank lay.

I moved towards the door. There was the sound of something climbing through the window, and the thump of something falling on the floor. Then there was another sound of falling, but this time it sounded soft . . . like a wet rag.

I pushed open the door and entered. The door made no sound. I saw de Ville standing by Frank's unconscious body, and saw something else behind him.

It was . . . I can't find any creature to resemble it in this world, unless it was a jellyfish. But a jellyfish hasn't got legs, and



a jellyfish hasn't got an eye that protrudes up out of the centre on a stalk.

De Ville stood back, and muttered some strange words. I am not an Ipsissimus, so I did not know what they denoted. But it was clear that they were some sort of order to the Thing, for it began to move toward Frank.

Still moving silently, I went over to the table, on which stood a flask of Holy Water. The Thing was intent on Frank, and de Ville had his back to me. I unscrewed the top, and threw the Holy Water over the Thing.

The effect was instantaneous. The Thing dissolved in a shower of glittering atoms, and the flask of Holy Water was empty. But I had not got rid of de Ville. He turned to me, and screamed: "I curse you in the name of . . .!" But he got no further. I always carry a small gold crucifix with me in my pocket, and I had pulled it out in the space of a second and thrown it at his evil, decayed face. He gave a horrible scream and vanished in a curl of smoke. For a minute I saw something else, something indescribably obscene, then the room was empty except for the inert Frank and me. Outside, across the wild moorland, I heard the yelping of a dog. Otherwise, the place was silent. Frank groaned and tried to get up. I helped him over to the settee, where he rested while I constructed two pentacles.

"Now," I asked him, "have you got ten pounds on you?"

He investigated, then gave an affirmative answer, brandishing the money under my nose as he did so.

"All right," I said. "Now here's what you'll have to do. You must take that money and sit with it in the pentacle all night. When anything comes, as it definitely will, you must show it the money and tell it that you want to buy back your soul. Now, is that clear?"

He assured me that it was, just as the sun sank below the horizon. We went to our respective pentacles, and I heard Frank frantically trying to say the Lord's Prayer.

It's going to be a long night, I thought.

-VIII-

Have you ever been in a pentacle on Walpurgis night? Believe me, it's not a thing to be experienced by anyone with a nervous temperament. I have never been the same since that night at Bradmoor; in fact, I would probably not be here now, writing this account, but for Divine intervention that saved me from a ghastly fate at the hands of the Devil's priests, or something worse.

It was a stormy night. Thunder rumbled across the moors and lost itself in the hills beyond. Dogs howled, owls hooted and a bitter boomed somewhere out on the marshes. Frank was muttering "I buy back my soul for ten pounds . . . I buy back my soul for ten pounds . . . I . . ."

Then it started. I started to fancy whispers in the room, whispers that said obscene things, whispers that were trying to persuade me to do obscene things too. But I shut my eyes and visualized Christ on the Cross, and the whispers died away and stopped altogether.

Apparently the whispers continued for Frank, for he was not saying anything about his soul, but something very different. But as he had no soul, obscenity

had no meaning for him, and he had no resistance against it.

I shouted, "Frank, shut up! Remember your soul!" At this, he relapsed into silence, but finally broke out again with the formula I had told him to repeat.

There was a humming in the air. Suddenly without warning, there came a sound of laughing. It vibrated in the air, a slow rhythmical [sic] laughter. It sounded like a chorus of lunatics, invisible ones at that. It was horrible. Frank's face had gone pale; a stream of saliva ran from the corner of his mouth. He started to try to get out of the pentacle, but something held him back.

This time I said the Word. The laughter became shrieks and died away. Frank wiped his forehead and tried to look as if he was not scared. But he was; so was I.

I thought I saw the jellyfish in a corner, but after a minute it disappeared. Then, quite suddenly, the electric light, which had been switched on, dimmed and went out. A hot wind blew at my face, and something squealed [sic]. Three loud knocks came from the window, and as the Thing squealed louder, the window started to open.

The darkness was lit again, but not by electric light. It came from the window, and it was the light of flames. At first I thought that the house was on fire, but then I saw that I had been mistaken. For this was not true fire, but ethereal fire, and in the centre was a many-faceted jewel, that seemed to writhe in agony, and I knew that it was Frank's soul, trying to return to its body. But then a hand, a fleshless skeleton hand, came through the flames, and took the soul through the fire, back to the empty beyond where the souls of the damned howl forever. And I heard Frank give a suppressed sob of agony as the Hand took his soul.

"Keep going!" I encouraged him. "Walpurgis night has only just started."

"I know," he answered. "That's

what is worrying me."

It had gone dark again, when suddenly something crashed through the window. I could hear its panting and growling, a sound that made my blood run cold. But all I could see was a vague intensifying of the darkness, and two red eyes that seemed to glow. The fiery glow came back and the Beast was illuminated. I have never seen one since, and I do not want to. But I knew instinctively what it was. It was a chien du feu, a Hound of Hell!

It put back its head and bayed, then glared at me balefully. As it did this again, I picked up one of the flasks of Holy Water and threw it down the Hound's throat.

Once again the powers of Good triumphed over those of Evil. The Thing dissolved, but Frank's voice shouted "John! Look out! It's behind you! Look out!"

I turned. There was nothing behind me, but I heard a stealthy movement in the spot that I had been facing a moment before. Whipping round, I saw a purple face floating in the air just outside. The Word got rid of it, however.

"Who was that shouting?" came Frank's voice.

"Wasn't it you?" I asked.

"No," he said. "It was another of the Things that hunt me, no doubt. If they can imitate my voice, who can tell what more they may do?"

There was a ghastly scream from behind Frank. He jumped up . . . and knocked over one of the cruets of Holy Water. . . .

The face of de Ville materialised in the air, and swiftly his naked body produced itself. A green glowing figure of horror appeared on the other side of the pentacle. It had no face. A snake was suddenly curling around Frank's body, and above him a skeleton hand, holding a glowing knife, materialized. The horrors converged on him. . . .

Suddenly darkness descended on my mind, and I knew no more.



-IX-

I was a jewel, floating in a humming void. I had no feelings or emotions; I could not speak, only think. I told myself, quite unemotionally, that I was dead.

I found that I could project myself to any spot, faster than the speed of light. I projected myself, quite unhurt, to Bradmoor's cellar. Then I knew the truth. The voices. The footsteps down the disused stairway. The fact that tonight was Walpurgis night.

Bradmoor was the place where, unknown to Frank, The Grand Sabbat was held!

The footsteps and other noises had been the witches and Devil's priests taking the equipment for the Black Mass to the meeting-place. And they knew that Frank had sold his soul, and would not be able to use the Powers of Good to help him. But they had not realised that he might write to a friend who knew how to disperse Evil. Even so, I had not saved him, and I could not do so now, for I was dead.

The witches in the place under Bradmoor had a girl on the altar, and they were going to sacrifice her to some filthy god that they worshipped. I could see a Thing near the altar; it was the figure of an old man, clad in black robes that were covered in Satanic symbols, but his head was that of a

wolf, the teeth dripping with blood and saliva. He moved forward, toward the altar upon which lay his prey, a girl who probably knew nothing at all about Black Magic and Satanism. If she had known about it, she could have protected herself.

I strove to put a barrier of Divine protection around her. "Oh God, don't let her die. She is so young, so beautiful." And almost immediately a huge white dove flew down and alighted on the altar. Putting its wings around her, it vanished through the wall. A vulture glowing with an eerie red light, appeared to follow the dove, only to be struck down by a fork of white lightning.

The darkness began to disperse; the inner light started to fade. My soul was quite inexplicably, returning to my body.

Then I had a feeling that, in the void, I was not alone. A voice echoed in my mind. "You have done as much as you could. As a reward, you will not die yet. The night is finished, and you will return to your body. . . ."

I was in the pentacle, and the sun was just rising. My eyes raked round the room . . . and then I froze, as I saw the other pentacle.

A small pile of ash lay just in-



side it, like that which could result from pound notes being exposed to the fires of Hell. Frank lay on his back in the middle of the pentacle. There was no wound or mark on him. But he was dead!

-X-

There was an inquest, of course. But the verdict was "Death by natural causes," and I gave none of the evidence that is written here. They would only have said I was crazy, anyway.

And de Ville? Nobody knows,

but I can guess. I think he should have been named Le Noir for his short stay on earth, or maybe Natas.

I think that, even though the powers of Good are on our side, when we go near anything or anybody evil, we should be careful. Corruption's claws can sink deep into human flesh.

As for me, I am a bank clerk. It is a boring job, but at least I am relatively safe from de Ville. I never laid another ghost, except that of The Tower, of which you will learn if you read on.



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 ure denotes width).



HYBRID

Tom Dickson stood quite still, amazed at what he saw, lying in the middle of that barren place. It was a man, naked except for a cloth which covered his head and face.

Then a numbing horror began to creep into his mind. The hands were long and the nails were long and pointed. That was disgusting enough, but the thing that horrified him was that the hands were dripping with blood!

The Thing began to crawl towards him. It made a motion of throwing away the cloth, and he screamed. "No!" he cried. "You won't make me see the face! I'll shut my eyes!" But he couldn't. They seemed to be stuck open. The Thing crawled nearer, and half-dropped the cloth, revealing a pointed muzzle, and red eyes that seemed to bore into his eyes. . . . He could not escape, the Thing was hypnotising him. . . .

"You say you are in a barren rock desert, the only landmark being a rock that resembles a hand pointing up into the sky?" said the psychiatrist.

"Yes, that's right," said Tom Dickson, "but the inexplicable part of it is that, even though I'm in a place that seems to be, even though it's impossible, a desert, I can hear the sound of the sea, quite near me too! What do you make of it?"

"It strikes me," said the psychiatrist curtly, "that you're making altogether too much of this dream. After all, what can a dream, however horrible, do to you?"

"You try it, sometime!" shouted Dickson, leaping out of his chair. "It's driving me mad!" He smashed his fist down on the psychiatrist's desk, making the inkwell jump into the air and getting a splash of ink in his eye for his troubles. Wiping his eye, he continued, "Can't you do anything for me?" in a somewhat subdued tone of voice.

"My advice," said the psychiatrist, "is to go for a few weeks in Cornwall," while he frantically endeavoured to mop ink off his once-shining desk.

"Thanks," said Dickson. "Maybe I will. In fact, I will!"

You can easily lose yourself in Cornwall, if you're not careful to note your surroundings. Dickson found that out when he lost himself there on the first day of his "rest cure."

He had been walking along the rocky coast, when it happened. The red mist that he had noticed gathering over the sea was, quite swiftly, extending smoky tentacles across the water and curled round him. . . . Very soon the only thing in sight was a flat wall of pink mist. Dickson did not think of the strange colour at the time. He looked at his watch: six o'clock.

The sun would set soon. There was a faint copper-coloured disc floating in the sky, but it was sinking.

Before long it had disappeared. He walked along through the night, and before long he found that he must lie down, he was so tired. The mist began to disperse as he lay down on the dew-covered grass.

Waking up, he found the mist had completely disappeared. He took stock of his surroundings; the place looked like a rock desert. The only landmark was a rock that resembled a pointing finger.

A movement behind him made him turn. A man stood there. He was young and very dark with green eyes. His canine teeth were pointed and extremely long. His voice was soft and purring, like the low growling of a dog. "Lost your way?" he asked Dickson.

"Yes, I have, as a matter of fact," Dickson answered. "Do you know the Planet Hotel?"

"I do," said the green-eyed young man. "But I don't think you'll be able to get there till tomorrow. The road between it and here has been flooded. I would be honoured if you would consent to stay the night at my house. It is only a few hundred yards down the shore. Come! Let us go!"

"What is your name?" Dickson panted as he ran after the young man, who seemed to run like a wolf.

"Call me Lupus!" called back the young man, over his shoulder.

Lupus's home was a small house on the edge of a cliff. As Lupus was just eating his meal . . . Dickson did not know which meal, he had no notion what time it was, but he thought it was breakfast . . . as Lupus was just eating his meal, he invited Dickson to join him. But Dickson found it almost impossible to eat a pork shop with an all-wood knife and fork.

Late that afternoon, just before sunset, Dickson was alone in



Lupus's house. Lupus had said he was going to "get some food." As he sat before a fire in the lounge, reading To the Devil—A Daughter, a book from Lupus's shelf, a slow realisation crept over him, and he began to feel afraid. The place where Lupus had met him was the scene in his dream!

He ran along the shore to the rocks. Yes, there it was, exactly as it had been in his dream, except that there was no naked body lying inert on the rocks. . . . He felt a touch on his shoulder.

He turned. A naked man with a wolf's head stood there.

A voice said, "Now I've got food." It was Lupus's voice.

As the Thing tore his throat out, he realised in his last moments why Lupus did not use silver knives.





-PROLOGUE-

As a monument to anyone, it was very impressive. As a monument to Franz Asta, it was impressive, but there was some aura of evil about it that brought into the mind thoughts of suicides falling from the roof and splattering, dolls of red pulp, at the bottom. Looking up at the tower, Reynard knew of the Tower's bad reputation, and even though it was a hot day, he shivered. The ancient maxim said, What goes up must come down, but apparently scientific laws did not apply to the Asta Tower, for many people had gone up the stairway into the Tower and most of them had not returned.

Reynard, a college student, was to sleep the night out in the Tower, for when two of his student friends had heard of its evil reputation, they told him that they were willing to bet twenty pounds on the fact that he would not sleep in the Asta Tower. With a student's usual recklessness about such things, Reynard had taken on the bet, and now he scanned his night's lodgings, the Tower.

When he had been in the local museum with his friends, they had seen a portrait, captioned under a glass case. The portrait showed a man with high cheek-bones and

The Tower



red, sunken eyes. He had a cruel mouth, with thin bloodless lips that seemed to be permanently set in a sneer. The caption informed them that "this man is Franz Asta, a count of the sixteenth century. He is reputed to have practiced sorcery in the Tower, named after him, outside this town. Many people were invited to the Tower, his permanent residence, and some of their bodies were found in the moat, which dried up in the long past, but there were two small holes in their throats where the life-blood had been sucked out of their bodies." This was in German, but has been translated for the benefit of my listeners and readers.

Reynard was ascending the shadowy stairs. Outside, some weird animal gave a sobbing cry. Fog was stretching smoky tentacles through the gaping holes of windows.

Reynard lay on a bench in the darkness. Suddenly a cold wet hand brushed across his face. He screamed . . . and then he felt a kiss, not on his lips, but on his throat . . . his throat felt numb, he couldn't breathe . . . and the hand was laid on his mouth, so that he couldn't scream. . . .

His student friends came for him

the next morning and found him dead. All the blood had been drunk through two holes in his throat, and there were marks around his mouth that showed that a hand had been held across his mouth. The two students, horrified and broken at what they had done, ran all the way to the nearest police-station, leaving behind them a small wooden whistle, with Latin words engraved on its side, clutched in Reynard's dead hand.

* * *

I read about the Tower Mystery in one of the foreign journals. It was a topic of conversation there for a month. Then they started talking about a woman who had. . . But I am not here to tell you my sordid News of the World cases. I investigate psychic cases, not cases of that kind. I wouldn't want to. . . Oh well, it's too late now anyway.

As I was going to say, the whistle that had been in Reynard's hand when they found him, had not been buried with him. Unfortunately, it had been left in the morgue, and when the police came to take it as an item in the inquest, it had gone. Whether some thief with an eye for strange loot had taken it, or whether its owner had returned for it, was not possible to say. But it had certainly gone.

As I am a psychic investigator, as you learned in Bradmoor, I knew at once that the Terror of the Afka Tower was none other than that most terrifying of all denizens of darkness, a vampire. I have never met a vampire in combat before, and I can assure you that I do not wish ever to do so again. There is a spiritual, as well as a mortal danger from were-bats.

And the whistle? you ask. What has that to do with vampires? Those of you who have read M. R. James' story, which deals with a whistle, may have some idea. Those who never heard of M. R. James, read on, while the shadows move and weird night noises assail your ears.



-I-

Mist was creeping over the land by the time I reached the Tower. It was like a pointing finger, a stairway to Heaven . . . or to Hell. There was indeed an aura about it, there seemed to be something watching from the Tower. An invisible Thing waited in the tower for prey to come blindly into its clutching claws.

A bird alighted on the towering battlements. Birds do not usually frighten me, but this was the filthiest of all gnawers of carrion . . . a vulture. A wet hand was tracing its way down my spine when the vulture, giving vent to that horrible cry that is so often heard near dead bodies in this country, disappeared through a gaping window-hole. I walked back to my car, feeling that this was the most evil place that I would come up against. Then, my mind reminding me of Bradmoor, I improvised on the second worst.

Starting up the engine, I found that it had inexplicably stopped completely. After an hour of pulling out every component and gazing at it as though I expected it to change into a worm, then putting them back in a convenient place, I found that the car still stayed as inert as ever. Finally I decided to go to the nearest village to fetch helpers.

The hand of night was creeping

over the country as I started off across the misty fields. Little droplets of moisture hung in spiders' webs; and as I thought of spiders, a cold shiver went down my spine. Spiders were too much related to the vampires, in my mind.

The mist was growing thicker all the time as I walked through the long grass. The grass seemed to cling to me, like thin slimy tentacles of an octopus. I looked back at the Tower once; it still stood, a pointing finger, silhouetted against the darkling sky; but there seemed to be a luminosity about it, a strange red glow, lighting it up.

It was eerie, all right, but I had no time to bother about the Asta Tower. My car's plight was more than enough. So I turned my back on it, and kept on across the mist-covered field. As a scream came from above me, I shivered, but it was a vulture, maybe the one I had seen at the Tower. I threw a stone at it, and with another cry, it flew off and disappeared into the mist.

On and on through the dark night I walked, until at last I saw a car in front of me. Then I looked to the left, and knew. The car was my own.

I was lost!

-II-

As soon as the realisation came to me, I knew it would be no good tiring myself out, and I went to the car and lay on the front seat. Very soon I was asleep.

I can't remember what I dreamed about, except that it was very unpleasant. I woke up screaming. When I saw where I was, it took me a few minutes to discover how I got there. Closed doors opened in my mind, and I remembered. I looked toward the Tower. . . .

The moat was filled.

Filled with green-yellow water that lit up the night with an eerie glow. It was like the glow I had seen emanating from the Tower a few hours ago, except that this was

green and the other had been red. It may not sound beautiful when it is described in words, but . . . at any rate to me . . . it had an unearthly beauty; and I knew that, whatever repercussions might result, I must leave the safety of the car to get a closer look at this unnatural phenomenon.

I slammed the door behind me and felt my way for the first few feet. Very quickly I reached the moat, and stood staring into the luminous depths. But before long I felt rather than heard a commanding voice; a voice that ordered me to go into the Tower, to ascend the winding stairs to the highest room; a voice of a supernatural Thing, a command that could not be disobeyed. And as I heard that Voice's call, the green water faded and was gone; but the red light around the Tower appeared again. The Voice called again; I walked into the dried-up moat, through the doorway and up the steps. . . .

Up. Up. Up. Higher and higher I went, at every step hearing the Voice ordering me to go to the highest room. And, powerless to disobey its command, I climbed, unaware till afterwards of the aching of my legs, of the trickle of red blood down my arm where I had cut it on a protruding window-ledge.

The door of the topmost room stood open, waiting for me to enter. I entered, and as soon as I was beyond the door, some invisible agency shut it. I looked up and saw it.

It was the figure of a man, a man with red, sunken eyes, a sneering mouth and high cheek-bones. He was holding a small red book, and as I came through the door he picked up a quill and wrote something in the book. Then he waved his hand at me and a few Latin words seemed to burn themselves into my brain; suddenly I felt numb and found I couldn't even move an eyelid, so extensive was the paralysis.

Then I knew that I was up against the roving spirit of Franz

Asta, Black Magician and vampire-raiser. And as I saw his hand go into his robe and put something to his lips, I knew also that he would consider me to be a victim, and call up his familiars to kill me . . . to make me into one of that ghastly league, the Vampires, the Un-Dead.

He blew the whistle.

The door opened, to admit a Thing, a Thing of horror, a man; it was dressed in a dark green robe, it had a twisted, dead-white face and . . . most horrible of all . . . where its hands should have been, there was empty space; the arms ended in stumps. The face was lacerated and torn; blood ran from newly-made wounds, and as I watched, still unable to move a muscle, the Count wrenched a whip from the wall and cut the Thing across the face with it. The Thing clutched its forehead and staggered through the doorway.

At the same time a huge bat flew in the window, and something told me that this was the Vampire, and this frightened me so much that I exerted all my will to call for Divine protection. Apparently I succeeded; the paralysis left my limbs, and I found I was free of the supernatural bond that had been hampering me. Even then, however, I was thinking how to prove the truth of my experience; then acting on a hunch, I said the Word mentioned in "Bradmoor." The ghost of the Count seemed to fall apart, and soon all that was left of Franz Asta was a white ivory frame, and even that became dust and blew out of the window as a breeze whispered into the room.

But on the floor, intact though yellowed with the passing of centuries, was the red book in which the Count had been writing when I entered the room. . . .

-III-

Returning to my hotel, I went up to my room and took out the book. I now saw it was a diary. I give some of the entries here.



They were once again in German, but as before I have given the English translation.

—June 9th, 1695. Max, my familiar, lured an old woman to my castle, where I ate her. She was not very frightened of Max, and did not expect him to drink her blood. . . .

—January 19th, 1857, . . . Killed three peasants by means of curses and incantations to Zamiel. . . .

—July 26th, 1958 . . . Lured English psychic investigator, John Campbell, to my castle. I am about to put out his eyes and eat him. Have just called Van Haak to the room. . . .

I decided to find out, if possible, who Van Haak was. Going down to the museum, I asked the proprietor who he had been. He knew the story, and answered:

"He was a witch who lived in the same time as Asta. One day Asta invited him to his castle . . . the Asta Tower, you know. . . . He was never seen again, at least not alive. They found him in the moat with his face covered with raw wounds and his hands cut off. The story says that after death he was doomed to become one of Franz Asta's familiars. Of course, it's only a story. . . ."

Oh, yeah? I thought.

My hotel again. As I crossed the lawn I looked towards the place where, I knew, the Tower would be

silhouetted against the skyline. I glanced in its general direction. Then I took a long look. My eyes still registered the same.

The Asta Tower was no longer there!

I rushed to find somebody who'd tell me that my eyes had gone wrong, that the Tower was still there. A young American, also staying at the hotel, was the first person that I met. "What's happened to the Tower?" I cried, catching at his arm. "I left it about four o'clock this morning, and it was still intact. What went wrong?"

He did not ask me what I was doing in a lonely tower at four o'clock in the morning, as I expected him to. He only answered "You were lucky. It couldn't have been more than fifteen minutes after you left, that the place started to crumble. About half-an-hour later the only thing they found was a pile of bricks and the skeleton of a huge bat. They haven't found out yet what it was that caused it to fall apart. Queer affair altogether; if you ask me, I think that . . . if there were such things . . . ghosts had something to do with it."

"Maybe," I said numbly. "Uh . . . thanks for telling me."

MAIL-CALL (continued from p. 21)

enjoyable.

Having just read Fred Chappell's Dagon, I am in agreement with the letters in Crypt #48. It appears that Chappell uses the Mythos element to visualise his own need for an actual "centre" to the plot—a basis on which to build "his" story of a man's growing insanity. Without the Mythos element we have a man's thoughts and images conveyed through his madness. With the Mythos the plot is based better, and provides a depth and indeed a reason for the man's madness. I liked Phinas Kornegay's comment on the story being like

I went up to my room and took out my notebook to copy down the entries in Asta's diary. I went over to the drawer in which the little red book lay, and opened it.

The drawer was empty.

I have no proof now, so I don't expect you to believe a word of this. But I've never been able to decide this: did the diary, like the Tower, crumble into nothingness? Or did something . . . something supernatural . . . take it into the Beyond? Or was it a thief with an eye for strange loot that took it? I don't know. I never will.

What do you think?



Videodrome; it does have a sense of "what's going on now?" in it.

--Mike D. Mason

Loughborough, England

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CONVERSATION IN A RAILWAY CARRIAGE

DISAPPEARING WIFE POLICE CANNOT FIND ANY BODY

The mysterious disappearance of Mrs. Gillian Shelton has still not been accounted for. She vanished from her house late last night; no trace of her body has yet been found. Police believe that her husband murdered her and burned the body in the fireplace.

So read Jim Grant, sitting in a third-class non-smoker railway carriage. He was not horrified, as any normal person would be. In fact, he was very pleased. But then, he had good reason to; he had murdered her.

"Hope she rots in hell," he muttered. "Damn her, marrying somebody while I was in the army! I'm glad I killed her! But the police will never find the body . . ." he gave a grim smile. ". . . I've seen to that!" He sat back in his seat. "My God, but I'm hungry!"

The train rocked from side to side. A long high scream assailed his ears; an express was sending out its cry as it raced in the other direction, as a gull lets out its shriek as it skims over the surface of the water.

Click! The lights dimmed and went out. The only light in the

carriage now was the faint light of twilight. Very soon the train entered a station; the door opened to admit a woman, Grant could not see her face owing to the bad light. She sat down and took out her newspaper, which he had noticed her frantically snatching from a bookstall as the train squealed into the station. For some time the only sound in the carriage was the rustling of paper. Then the woman suddenly ejaculated "Fools!"

Grant jumped at the sudden, sharp sound. Then, regaining his composure, he sat back and said "I beg your pardon?"

"I said 'Fools!'" said the woman. "The police don't know what they're talking about. They say Mrs. Shelton's body was burnt; it isn't true! That's not at all what happened to it!" Grant felt odd; this was getting too near home for his liking. But, still keeping his voice under control, he said: "What did happen, then?"

"He ate the body, of course," she said coolly. "And it wasn't the husband, either; it was somebody else, somebody called Jim Grant." He leapt towards the seat opposite; but at that moment the train stopped with a grinding jerk, and with a "This is my stop," the woman opened the door and climbed out.

He jumped out after her; she knew his secret, she mustn't es-

cape! Then he saw her face . . . the eyes had been cut out, he hadn't wanted to eat them. He fell on the platform, screaming and

foaming at the mouth. Before long everyone in the station was watching him; the police found him dead of a broken blood vessel.

R'LYEH REVIEW (continued from page 51)

the time the most commonly fatal type of cancer in men—it's fairly certain that cancer that kills as swiftly as his did after it was diagnosed had been in the body for as long as several years. It's not without a little poignance, then, that one realizes that even as he was writing the later stories that would immortalize him, Lovecraft was already dying.

On a more pleasant note Everts has also annotated two unbound folios of Lovecraft's verse epistles. Both are written in the heroic couplet style of the master verse-epistle writer, Alexander Pope, and like Pope's, both are witty attacks on the culture of their time.

An Epistle to Francis, Ld. Belknap is subtitled "With a Volume of Proust, presented to him by his aged Grandsire, Lewis Theobald, Jun., Christmas, 1918." In this mock epic of eighty-two lines, a perplexed Lovecraft searches for a suitably "modern" volume to present to Frank Belknap Long, since, "For sure, 'twere vain on normal Art to lean / In Youth's jazz'd World of Concrete and Machine!" Although little more than a platform from which Lovecraft vents his spleen on modern writers like Joyce and Eliot and how short they fall of the classics, it shows that Lovecraft was at least familiar enough with their work to comment upon it. Included with this poem is a facsimile of "The Spectator," a juvenile account of Lovecraft's imaginary visit to New York that is amusing when one considers the sentiments he would express some years later, after having lived there.

An Epistle to the Rt. Honble Maurice Winter Moe, Esq. of Zythopolis, in the Northwest Territory of HIS MAJESTY'S American Dominion

by L. Theobald, Jun. is slightly more epic in length (212 lines) and just as comic in tone ("Zythopolis" was Lovecraft's Latinization of Milwaukee—it translates roughly as "beer city"). Lovecraft wrote it for his friend in amateur journalism on the occasion of Moe's 25th Class Reunion. As Lovecraft's own reminiscence of what life was like in 1904—a year when "Boston was still a sep'rate realm from Cork, / Whilst English yet was spoken in New York!"—it's an amalgam of observations on what was topical in world news (Percival Lowell's observations on the canals of Mars, the birth of the Czar's ill-fated heir) and the popular culture (Buster Brown comic strips and the lyrics of "Sweet Adeline").

Like all of Lovecraft's descents into humor, this poem begs the question how much of his joking was good-natured and how much was a gloss over something that really rankled. There is, for example, the following couplet: "A brief recess—now back to art's dim last row, / To doctor that curst junk by old De Castro!" It leaves one wondering at the gentility of Lovecraft's letters to de Castro some six years later (see *Crypt* #46), and whether those letters would have been written at all if, as Moe originally intended, the poem was published in a book.

Everts' annotations are helpful for some of the more obscure personal references in both poems, but many are unnecessary and some questionable (is Percy Shelley really "more famous for marrying the author of Frankenstein"?). Though the poems themselves are trifles, the Strange Company has enhanced their value with the usual quality

(continued on page 47)



The Mask

-1-

The owner of the boarding-house was a rather facetious young man with a drooping moustache. He was the type, Dick Moorhead knew, who would make a standing joke of Moorhead's tendency to write a ghost story whenever he had a moment of spare time, which was often. The young man, who introduced himself as Fred Laird, had noticed the name "Richard P. Moorhead" on Moorhead's luggage, and immediately asked "Are you the ghost-story writer?"

Moorhead didn't like the emphasis on the "you." He answered coldly, "I am that person. Why?" The young man hastened to pacify him with "I've read a lot of your books. I particularly enjoyed The Prowling Horror of Woodville. Are you writing one now?"

The conversation continued, and as it unfolded Moorhead began to feel that Laird might not be so cynical, after all, about his stories. Laird, in fact, insisted in taking him into the lounge, where two copies of Eerie Stories reposed, hiding shyly in a corner of the scrupulously-polished bookcase. Looking at the numbers, Moorhead found he had contributed to both of them . . . in fact, they each contained an episode of his two-part serial, Spawn of Hell.

"I don't suppose," said Moorhead turning from the bookcase, "I don't

suppose that you've got a haunted room here?" Now he's got his chance, he thought. But surprisingly, Laird said, "No, we haven't got any ghosts, at least I don't think we have."

"Pity," said Moorhead. "Which room are you giving me?" Then, as Laird reached for a key, "Ah, Number 19, I see." He took it from Laird's outstretched hand, and told him that he would, as it was quite early in the afternoon, go to his room and unpack. He did so, and the remainder of the afternoon and evening passed uneventfully. At eleven-thirty he went to bed.

Lying in the soft velvet darkness, he remembered the events that had brought him to the small village, Crampton, which was about a half-mile from Laird's boarding-house. Eating his breakfast one morning at his London home, a line in the paper caught his eye. Strange Happenings in Village, it said. Is Crampton A Haunted Village?

Reading on, he was informed that a huge creature had been seen near the churchyard. It was covered with hair and had a wolf's head, according to witnesses. Old men were filling guns, trophies from some war fought long ago, with silver bullets. "Here," Moorhead had said to himself, "is a chance of a lifetime! Maybe I'll even meet the werewolf!" He was one of those people who believe in

what they write. So he packed a suitcase and drove to Crampton.

There were no hotels or boarding-houses in Crampton, but after an hour's search Moorhead found Laird's house. The rest has been told.

As Moorhead floated through the strange world of half-sleep, he resolved to make extensive inquiries in the region of the village. He did so, but found out nothing except a rather nasty rumour of the type that breed by the dozen in small villages. He went to the churchyard where the Thing was reputed to have appeared, but it did not materialize for him. No coffins rose out of the earth. No dead bodies lay on the grass. No corpses peered from behind trees. The place was just what it seemed to be: an ordinary cemetery, a place where the dead stayed dead. But then, of course, werewolves were, while being supernatural creatures of the worst kind, still alive. Maybe . . . Moorhead thought suddenly . . . maybe the Thing was not a werewolf at all, but some witch's familiar! That would mean a search for the "devil's mark," a search that would be thought obscene in modern England. But there I go, thought Moorhead ruefully, I run on and on when there isn't even any proof of the Thing's existence. A few old wives' tales. . . . The newspapers will fasten their teeth into anything if they're given a chance.

Returning to the boarding-house, he was surprised to find Laird waiting for him at the door. Laird usually had a grin on his face, so it was more of a surprise to see that he looked very worried. Before he knew what was happening, Moorhead found himself sitting in Laird's private room, being offered a cigarette by Laird.

"I hear you've been making inquiries in the village about the thing that was seen by the churchyard," was Laird's opening remark. "Do you know on what date it was seen?"

"Somewhere around the end of



October, wasn't it?" came Moorhead's answer. Then he gave a gasp. "I say! Was it Hallowe'en Night?"

"As a matter of fact, it was," confirmed Fred Laird. "And as it was Hallowe'en, I thought I . . . Well, it seemed. . . . Oh, to hell with it. Come over here . . . look!" Mystified, Moorhead followed Laird over to a cupboard. As it opened, he bent forward to peer into it . . . and nearly fainted from the totally unexpected momentary horror.

The werewolf stared out at him with blind, gaping eye-sockets. It was some time before Moorhead realised that it was only the skin that lay at the bottom, an empty hulk. So Laird had killed the werewolf! Moorhead thought, and turned to Laird to ask. "How did you kill it?" But Laird's face had become more worried still, and he only said, "I see that you don't understand yet." "Admittedly, I don't," said Moorhead, "is there something else?"

"Look," said Laird fiercely, "I was in London on the twenty-ninth. I saw this thing in the window of a junk-shop, and suddenly it struck me that it would be rather good to have a Hallowe'en joke on the villagers, so I went in and got the skin."

"But the newspapers got hold of the story, and of course I didn't say a word to anyone about my part in it, I was too scared. However, I don't want you to go to any

further trouble. So now you know.

"I am the werewolf!"

* * *

Moorhead lay in bed, thinking of every torture to which he would like to subject Fred Laird. Bringing him down to a stinking house like this on a fool's errand . . . the cheek of it, blast him! Oh well, this was the last night he was going to spend under this roof, thank God. He'd have started out tonight, had his car not refused to start. Still, the garage proprietor had said that the car would be as good as new in the morning.

A sudden noise behind him made him start. He turned over . . .

Standing there, with one skinny hand pointing at him, was the most ridiculous figure that Moorhead had ever seen. It was not the long, flowing garment, quite obviously a sheet, that it wore; though it could be seen as a crude attempt to portray the traditional robes of the old-time ghost. The thing that made him double up with laughing was the face.

It was the face of a devil. At one part the material had torn, exposing the skin of the wearer. Moorhead knew that if he ripped off the mask, the face of Fred Laird would be underneath. And that was just what he intended to do. To think that the idiot actually thought to scare him with a damn fool get-up like that! He'd show him that he wasn't going to play on Moorhead's beliefs. He wasn't getting off lightly either. Moorhead would show him. . . . With one movement he leapt towards the figure and ripped off the devil-mask.

He stood there with the mask in his hand, too terrified to cry out, paralysed by fear of a Thing not of this world, a Thing from the Great Unknown.

-II-

The man on the floor was undoubtedly dead. By the expression

on his face, he had died of fright. By other signs, he had been throttled. Inspector Swann looked at the body, rather sadly; though his sorrow stemmed more from the fact that he had absolutely no clues than from the loss to humanity that had just taken place.

Of course, there was the disappearance of Laird, the proprietor of the place. That was incriminating enough. Gone without a trace! He hadn't told anyone he was going; nobody had seen him for a few days.

Then there were the floorboards. How did they fit in? They had been thrown up, it seemed, by pressure from below. They were in the room in which the body had been found. Had . . . something come from under the floor and put its hands round the man's neck?

There was some link between these incidents . . . there had to be. "If only we could get hold of Laird," the Inspector remarked to the constable who had been the first agent of the law to see the body. "At least we know who he is," said the Constable pointing at the body on the floor. "Richard P. Moorhead's written his last thriller for Eerie Stories. Pity too, I've never missed an issue." He caught the Inspector's eye and suddenly found an enraptured interest in a monstrosity that was intended to be a vase. Finally, he said "Is there a cellar in this place?" "How the hell should I know?" retorted Swann irritably. "We'd better find out, there may be something down there."

Five minutes later, the two men looked at each other in something like horror. They were standing in the cellar, and at their feet lay the body of Fred Laird. The protruding tongue and marks on the throat were indisputable signs that Laird had been throttled.

"What on earth happened?" asked the Constable as they locked up the silent house and prepared to return to the police station. "I suppose we'll never know . . ."



-III-

It may be a hard task for my readers to visualise Laird as a murderer. Not an intentional one, maybe; but whether intentional or not, he was definitely a murderer.

When Frank Jameson, a believer in all superstition, found that Laird laughed at his beliefs, he made up his mind to give Laird such a shock as would not be forgotten for many nights. Walking to the village that same evening, he purchased a cardboard devil-mask and a sheet, returning when everybody else, Laird included, was in bed.

So much can be surmised. What took place after that will never certainly be known, but the scene can be constructed, from a blood-stained poker, with one or two strands of human hair still adhering to it, found in Laird's bedroom; also by certain other signs.

What happened after Jameson let himself into Laird's bedroom can be pictured. Laird waking, seeing something leaning over the foot of his bed; something that, by his half-sleeping brain, seemed to be a fiend from the depths of Hell. He clutches up a poker, lying at hand on the hearth by his bed; brings the implement down on the Thing's skull. Sheet and mask fall away, and Laird sees no demon, but only Frank Jameson in his death-throes.

Laird, horrified at what he has done, realises that he must dispose of the body. He tears up the floorboards in one of the rooms, lays the body, with disguise, in the niche. When he is asked "Where is

Jameson?" he answers to the effect that he was called away in the night on urgent business. The disappearance made a small stir in the papers at the time, but after a few months the police ended their investigation, no wiser than when they began.

That was three years before Moorhead ever met Laird. A year after the death of Jameson, we come to one of the parts of the affair which seems to admit none but a supernatural explanation; it is recorded in Laird's diary, which he had been writing on the night of his death.

Laird was alone in the house when it happened; he heard strange noises coming from the room in which Jameson's corpse was hidden. Entering the room, he was horrified to see the floorboards being forced up from below; and, according to the appropriate entry in his diary, "I saw a hand reach up; I stamped on it, whereupon its owner retracted it. Then the top of a head came into view; I could not bear to look upon the face, and rushing out of the room, I locked the door."

I will let the last entry speak for itself; the pen lay in a blot across the page, the sentence which he had been writing was only half-finished. The entry I have reproduced below, for the benefit of my readers.

"August 2nd, 1958. Tonight is the anniversary of the death of Jameson. Will he haunt me? I cannot tell. But if he can only return in the flesh, I shall lock myself in the cellar till daybreak. Will his face be as horrible as the glimpse I got on that night when I saw the boards rising in . . . that Room? A face like . . ."

But there the sentence ends. There is no more. And we mortals will never know what horrifying Face Moorhead saw when he ripped off the Mask.

No trace has yet been found of the body of Frank Jameson. Did his body crumble to dust when his ghostly revenge had been achieved?

Or was it taken into a Beyond where only the Dead are allowed . . . a Place which has no name?

-THE END-

R'LYEH REVIEW

(continued from page 42)

production on heavy stock with vintage photographs.

Robert Bloch, American Gothic. TOR, 1987. 244 pp. \$3.95.

(Reviewed by Stefan Dziemianowicz)

In the publishing business, marketing is destiny. When Robert Bloch's American Gothic appeared in paperback in 1975, distributors saw the word "gothic" and a sappy cover illustration, and promptly shelved it alongside the Barbara Cartland clones. It died a quick and undeserved death.

Granted, the story has gothic elements, including a dark foreboding castle and an imperiled maiden. But the castle is located in Chicago, not on a windswept moor, and the maiden turns out to have more spunk than most of her male friends and certainly more than any of the withering wallflowers whose virtue takes the mandatory eight-count in these types of stories. Bloch purposely manipulates these stock genre elements to transform them into a vehicle suitable for his particular type of horror story.

That story concerns one G. Gordon Gregg, a quack pharmacist who builds a castle on the corner of 63rd and Wallace streets in Chicago the year of the 1893 World's Fair. A thoughtful capitalist, Gregg sees that the best way to profit from this extravagance is to eliminate the middle man—literally. Like an American Sweeney Todd (Gregg's near contemporary), he murders guests who rent his rooms, disposes of their bodies in his cellar and pays his bills with their money.

Gregg's gothic castle is a leit-motif that functions like Bloch's earlier gothic building, the omnipresent house on the hill behind the Bates Motel in Psycho (which American Gothic resembles in many respects). Although an incongruity in a modern city, what goes on in Gregg's castle is a stark reminder that even among people capable of producing something as spectacular and enlightened as the Columbian Exposition, there are those who harbor more primitive, basic passions we would just as soon forget.

Hence the pun in the title. Bloch imbues the name of a painting known for its wholesomeness with a subtle unwholesomeness. This is a traditional gothic story in the sense that it is a morality tale cast against a darkened background. The background that throws it into sharp relief is a smug, self-congratulating part of America whose hypocrisy comfortably accommodates people like Gregg. (Bloch notes in a postscript that his villain is based on Herman W. Mudgett, who really did build a castle in Chicago in 1893 and who may have killed over two hundred people before he was finally apprehended and executed.)

Full as the novel is, there are several things one could wish for more of here. Gregg is one of the least developed characters in the story. One is more aware of him fulfilling a function rather than having an independent personality. Likewise, when the story cranks up to its somewhat anticlimactic ending, one is aware that as much as the gothic romance form gives Bloch a structure to toy with, it is also sometimes a creaking machine over which he must labor. But the story is well-paced and very evocative of its period and place. Although not a very descriptive writer, Bloch knows how to arrange scenes and what goes on in them to give a better visual impression than is at first evident in his streamlined prose.

As a final note, TOR Books must

(continued on page 12)



PREMONITION

A human soul in the centre of an oscillating vortex. A disembodied ego, the ego of a mass murderer, a fiend in human shape by the name of Harry Masters.

The ego sensed something materialising in the vortex. It came nearer, and Masters knew. All the strange events of his last week in the world came back in a terrible second of horrible realisation. . . .

It was very cold in the High Street, Masters noted, as he walked to his office. The rain slashed down from the sky in a liquid sheet, running along the gutter and splashing off any obstruction it chanced to meet. A muted rumble of thunder growled across the city; a few minutes later the thought crossed his mind that he had seen no lightning. He saw a fork of lightning a few minutes later; never before had he seen red lightning. He wondered if it would be in the papers that night.

An icy wind followed him into his office as he shut the door against the storm. As he hung up his coat in the hall, he saw another of the uncanny flashes. His body seemed suddenly to be exposed to the heat of a factory furnace. Agonizing pains came to his tortured mind from every part of his body,

and in horror he looked down at his hands, the only portion of his body visible to him. And then horror and madness claimed his mind, and at last he screamed; for nothing remained of his hands save black, smoking hulks. Then, to the accompaniment of a peal of thunder, blackness enveloped him and he knew no more.

When his eyes opened once more upon the world, it was to see a face looking down on him. Some minutes elapsed before he focused his eyes sufficiently to recognise it as that of his secretary. The memory of the horror he had just experienced came flooding back to him, and he looked down at his hands apprehensively; but there was not a mark on them, they were perfectly whole. On a minute's hard thinking, a more subtle horror presented itself to him: was he going insane?

The red lightning, too, could be but a figment of a crazed mind. He could not stand the uncertainty; he made up his mind to find out the truth, however terrible it might be. Turning to the secretary, he asked her "Did you see any lightning, Miss Woodvine?"

"No, sir! Not a flicker; nor a whisper of thunder. Torrents of rain, though; you never did see .

... " But here Masters interrupted with "Never mind. That will be all, Miss Woodvine. You can take the day off."

"Take the day off, sir?"

"Yes, I don't feel very well; I think I'll go home," answered Masters. And Miss Woodvine thought that was true; for he was certainly very pale.

Mark Garrett had not liked Masters; and in America, he made this dislike quite plain. He happened to know that Masters had two girl friends at that time, one known as Susan and the other Jill. Garrett rang up Jill and addressed her as Susan, then hung up. He did a similar thing to Susan, both times calling himself Frank.

This trick ruined Masters' relations with both girls, as would be expected. However, Masters resolved to have his revenge on the culprit; and one night in a drug-store, when he was more than a little drunk, he heard Garrett, who was in a similar state, boasting of the trick he had played. Masters rushed outside in a frenzy and set fire to the place. Too late did he realise what he had done, and by that time twenty people had died on the pyre. He flew back to England on the next 'plane, changing his name (his real name was Chatterton) to Masters.

These uneasy thoughts passed through Masters' mind as he twisted

uncomfortably in his bed that night. The wind rattled the doors and windows and screamed like a dying beast. Masters gave a final twitch, and at last succumbed to the unaccountable urge to get out of bed.

He walked to the window and leaned his elbows on the sill. Tattered clouds floated across the lurid sky. "I think I'll take a sleeping pill, I need the rest," he said to nobody in particular.

Returning from the bathroom with a glass of water, he saw the heavens open and release a flood. He took the little round box of pills out of its alcove and dissolved one in the glass.

At that precise moment the sky was torn open as a fork of red lightning lanced down. The horror of that morning was upon him again; he knew there would be a second flash of lightning, and that when it came, he would experience the sensation of being burnt alive. . . . He knew that he could still avoid it, however. With one movement he removed the lid of the box of pills and tipped the contents into the glass.

It was only when he felt death numbing his body that he realised that he was going out from his body, only to consign himself to the flames of which he had had a premonition. . . .

. . . the fires of Hell.



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Send For Free Catalogue

R'lyeh Review

R. Alain Everts, The Death of a Gentleman: The Last Days of Howard Phillips Lovecraft. 28 pp. \$4.95.

H. P. Lovecraft, An Epistle to the Rt. Honble Maurice Winter Moe, Esq. \$4.50

H. P. Lovecraft, An Epistle to Francis, Ld. Belknap. \$3.50.

(Each limited to 200 copies; all published by The Strange Co., Box 864, Madison, WI 53701)

(Reviewed by Stefan Dziemianowicz)

A half century after the event, Lovecraft's premature death is very much with us. In Randy Everts' The Death of a Gentleman: The Last Days of Howard Phillips Lovecraft, it is sometimes too much with us. Before you consider buying this expertly produced booklet, perhaps you should ask yourself how much you really want to know about Lovecraft's painful struggle with terminal cancer of the colon. Everts devotes considerable attention to details that have not appeared in other biographical studies, and the results are definitely not for the squeamish.

Based on Lovecraft's meager diary notations, retrospective interviews with his relatives and doctors, hospital records and physician's notes (a lot of the narrative is little more than a description of the clinical signs and symptoms of his condition and the palliative treatment of his pain and discomfort), the account follows Lovecraft's life from roughly New Year's Day to March 15 of 1937. As we've come to expect of Strange Company publications, this one is crammed with photos and memorabilia. Obituary notices from several papers are also reproduced.

Lovecraft apparently noted his problem first as indigestion (what he referred to as his "grippe") back in 1936. He was still ambula-

tory until February, when pain finally confined him to his bed, but he wasn't admitted into the Jane Brown Memorial Hospital until March 10. Although the diary Lovecraft kept at this time has been lost, Robert H. Barlow copied out some of the entries and condensed others. Everts reproduces them at the back of the book and they are not pleasant reading. As Lovecraft's disease progresses, the word "pain" appears with increasing frequency, and the notes become more jagged, rarely running to full sentences. It's upsetting to think that a man with Lovecraft's descriptive powers was reduced by his illness to these final communications.

Everts' booklet also sheds interesting light on the people who were witness to Lovecraft's final days. Lovecraft's physician, Cecil Dustin, demonstrates extraordinary recall of his patient's illness (Everts' interview was conducted in 1972), although it's hard to believe that at the time he diagnosed terminal cancer from a physical examination alone. (This would be highly suspect even with today's more sophisticated medical knowledge.) Everts suggests that when Lovecraft was finally moved from 66 College Street to the hospital, Dustin did it as much for the benefit of Annie Gamwell, who had been totally discomposed by her nephew's illness, as for Lovecraft's sake.

Had the cancer been caught early, Lovecraft's prognosis might have been favorable (Everts notes that, with a sort of cruel irony, the same issue of the Providence Journal that carried Lovecraft's obituary carried an article on educating the public about the early warning signs of cancer). While we can only guess how early cancer had actually taken hold in Lovecraft—based on his generally poor health, his atrocious diet and the mortality statistics for what was at

(continued on page 42)

MAIL-CALL OF CTHULHU

I can't think how long it is that I've kept meaning to write to you. I've been a regular reader of Crypt of Cthulhu almost from the start and find it becoming more and more a compulsive read. Yet I'm not a great fan of HPL's fiction, but I find his life and his letters endlessly fascinating. As a result Crypt #46, just received, was a delight, and what with your new presentation, made the issue a total fascination. There's something of a microcosm of wonder that you can slip into when Crypt arrives, and I have a horrible feeling I may be coming addicted to it. Heaven help us all.

--Mike Ashley
Kent, England

Wilum Pugmire lent me a box of Crypts, and I haven't slept so poorly in weeks. I especially appreciate your theme issues, such as the CAS diad and the Lost Books issues. Perhaps you could devote a volume of arcane lore and theology to the women of weird tales? Surely the gentler sex has made many a contribution to the annals of fear and loathing?

--Maryanne Snyder
Seattle, WA

Koszowski's covers, especially for Crypt #22 and "The Tomb Herd," are most impressive.

--Bruce Walker
Largo, FL

I especially enjoy the diversity of your articles and the wide range of reader opinions which you print (such as the opposed reviews of From Beyond). Individual perspectives are essential for constructing an intelligent approach to literature and its interpretation. The "R'lyeh Review" is always interesting and a good resource for those who cannot easily obtain Lovecraft related materials in their hometowns. I hope that you can continue to provide the addresses of publishers and distributors of the materials which

you review. Thank you for the warped magazine which you give to us.

--Sean Branney
Boulder, CO

No. 49 is a truly amazing issue—it breaks new ground in Lovecraft scholarship, and that is no mean feat in view of all that has been written about HPL's work over the past half century.

I was, needless to say, very flattered by the book reviews—and delighted by Lin Carter's reference to Morgan Robertson and his memorable story. Robertson, by the way, was a former seaman turned author and much of his work was outside the SF or fantasy genres. A prolific writer, he is virtually forgotten today.

--Robert Bloch
Los Angeles, CA

I read Fat Face by Michael Shea. It was good. But I have something to say about Wagner's introduction which of course is a positive critique of Fat Face, lauding it beyond reason: "cosmic horror equaling HPL" . . . maybe equaling Derleth, yes, but NOT HPL! And Wagner manages to also put down most other Mythos stories, praising the few that he likes, stating with authority what is or what is not cosmically frightening. On page one you read a quote from Mountains of Madness, emphasis on shoggoths. On page one you meet Patti, the prostitute. I guessed the end. Correctly, too. Horrifying? No. Shoggoths dressing as humans in order to eat us. So? Deep Ones dressing as humans in order to mate with us? Maybe . . . What happens to the girl when she finally "makes it" with the shoggoth-man can be discovered by reading Lumley's Return of the Deep Ones where it is described in a much more cosmic manner (shoggoth feeding). Fat Face was good. I liked
(continued on page 21)

NEXT TIME . . .

Once we planned to call it quits with Crypt of Cthulhu #50. It seemed a long way away back then. In that case you would not have been reading this "Next Time" teaser. Its very presence denotes that we've got our second wind. Here's what you'll find in Crypt of Cthulhu #51:

- Mike Ashley, "Lovecraft and Blackwood: A Surveillance"
Thomas Ligotti, "The Mystics of Muelenburg"
Lin Carter, "The Benevolence of Yib"
Will Murray, "Did Lovecraft Revise 'The Curse of Alabad and Ghinu and Aratza?'"
Randall Larson, "Innsmouth Spawn"
Carl T. Ford, "Cthaat Aquadingen: A Guide to Further Research"
Shawn Ramsey, "Henry Kuttner's Cthulhu Mythos Tales: An Overview"
Robert M. Price and Tani Jantsang, "The True History of the Tcho-Tcho People"

CRYPT OF CTHULHU

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