

TIGERSHARK magazine



Issue Sixteen – Winter 2017 – The Mythos

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The Mythos

Editorial

The Cthulhu Mythos. The Yellow Mythos. Myth and Legend. There are many mythoi and we are investigating the darkest of them all...

The new themes for 2018 are now on the site and there should, soon, be an announcement concerning solo-author projects.

Contributors are invited to submit a bio for inclusion on the Tigershark website and your comments on the issue are welcome.

Best, DS Davidson

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Editor and Layout: DS Davidson

Next Issue's Theme:

Maybe Magic, Maybe Mundane

Tease us with ambiguity...

<https://tigersharkpublishing.wordpress.com/tigersharkpublishing@hotmail.co.uk>

due to bad weather
halloween cancelled
monsters in limbo

halloween warning
vamps, aliens, and monsters
in shadows lurking

evil doctors house
visit on Halloween eve
real monsters for rent

By Denny E. Marshall

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Castles

By Wayne Russell

Castles forged in snow white sands,
battle weary soldiers in simple form,
scuttle along, encased in drab armour.

Damsels trapped, captive within the
clouds of snowy rapture, weeping;
while an unfathomable liquid beauty
storms what was once some calm
walled existence.

Awake,

the voices whispered at blood
lotus dawn,

this dream has now ended.

Children in the Sky

By Michael Lee Johnson

There is a full moon,
distant in this sky tonight,

Gray planets planted
on an aging white, face.

Children, living and dead,
love the moon with small hearts.

Those in heaven already take gold thread,
drop the moon down for us all to see.

Those alive with us, look out their
bedroom windows tonight,
we smile, then prayers, then sleep.



Fantasia

By DS Davidson

Unlimited truth
A fiction through a child's eyes
Form without meaning
An elevated desire
Fantasia given birth

Visions of the End

By J.H. Hook

In all my years I've never known a nightmare to last so long, paint pictures so vivid, and haunt my waking hours as this one has. In describing these, at this point, nightly manifestations of horror, words can only go so far. I will try my best regardless, as challenging as it may be to my meagre skills.

I stand in ashes heaped almost as high as my ankle, breathing in the man-made mist. The air itself feels caustic, leaving an itch on my skin the like of which could become a burn at any moment without warning. The lamenting cries of great beasts echo through the fractured cityscapes of this future.

Then it comes.

From a black hole, it crawls. Life seeps out from the void where nothing should live, if such a thing can be considered alive as we know it. The ashes raise, part, and swirl on down abandoned streets. Travelling on warm, infernal winds, rats fleeing a ship they instinctually know to be lost. Its very proximity causes a gnawing agony through my bones and the sight of it twisting through the bloody skies is enough to break the minds of millions. Monolithic claws burst copper-tinged clouds with every swing and a primordial roar shakes the foundations of humanity. A billowing mass of black flame makes the body, an unholy furnace the mouth. Its appearance alone is harrowing to the core but the true horror, that which robs me of sleep and buzzes in the back of my mind, is nestled in the things stomach. A glorious, monstrous eye, bloodshot and weeping, it's gaze raking the ground.

That eye... It knows me. Knows every lie, every scrap of deceit, everything I've ever regretted in my life, it knows. I flee from the behemoth, finding whatever hiding place is left among the industrial skeletons. It's ultimately in vain, of course. Nobody runs faster than it eats. Huddled in the debris, the itching sensation grows and crawls across my body. The very presence of the earth-rending being exacerbates the unwelcome atmosphere and makes my brain feel swollen to the point of bursting. That is how I wake every morning, sweat-drenched and foetal, thoughts still trapped somewhere between the welcome relief of reality and that doomed realm. That realm that at first seemed so impossible but seems more plausible every time my tortured and torturous subconscious is dragged back inside it, to witness its final moments.

Don't ask me how I know it, it follows with the dream-logic that such phantasms operate on, but I am certain that if that blasphemous eye were ever to turn its final gaze on me I would simply die. I would be found in the coming days or weeks, tangled in my bed-sheets, hands curled into frozen claws of desperation.

And the most haunting thing of all? With every reiteration of the dream that eye draws inexorably closer. A few steps closer to my hiding place every night. It's languid, almost toying. Why shouldn't it be? It has all the time in the world.

The End

An Introduction to the Yellow Mythos

By DJ Tyrer

Even seeking to name this collection of loosely-interlinked stories and poems is fraught. Is it a subset of the Cthulhu Mythos? Is it the Hastur Mythos? (Confusingly, that was Derleth's preferred term for the broader Cthulhu Mythos.) Is it the Carcosa Mythos? Or, is it the Yellow Mythos? Maybe we're fooling ourselves into thinking it can be classified easily, if at all. Certainly, Bierce didn't envisage Chambers borrowing names from a couple of seemingly-unlinked stories, and neither of them foresaw Lovecraft co-opting Chambers' fiction into his, let alone the multiple interpretations and reinterpretations that followed (further confused, for example, by references to Chambers' work by authors unaware that Lovecraft and his successors had melded them into something quite different).

Although it was Ambrose Bierce who sowed the seeds of the Mythos, it was RW Chambers who adapted them into the form best known today, introducing *The King In Yellow* (play and entity) in his collection of the same name. As Lovecraft would later do, Chambers made use of nebulous yet recurring names and imagery to hint at an unknowable, hidden horror. Indeed, his touch is so light that he leaves almost everything about the dread play, the world it describes and the horrors it unleashes to the imagination of the reader. Indeed, almost everything most people 'know' about the King, Hastur, Carcosa and the play is derived from later interpretations, many contradictory.

This lack of cohesion, or truth, both in reality and in the fiction, is at the very heart of the Mythos. Within the fiction, the truth is always just out of grasp and even the slightest flicker of understanding brings madness not enlightenment, unless the two are the same thing. In reality, neither Lovecraft, Chambers nor Bierce established a definitive 'truth' for their successors to work with, and any subsequent who have attempted to do so have been in conflict with other writers pursuing their own, sometimes self-contradictory, interpretation. There is no definitive 'canon' of stories – each Mythos has its own slightly-different slant – and there doubtless have been readers aware of Hastur through the writings of Lovecraft and Derleth who never read a word of Chambers and Bierce, whilst there are definitely those who have embraced Chambers' corpus without being aware of anything that came after. Those interested in learning more about the myriad different interpretations of the Mythos are directed to the Yellow Site, an ever-growing wiki of Yellow-tainted information.

As a quick primer, the commonest interpretation is that the play known as *The King In Yellow* drives readers insane and, so, was banned and most copies destroyed. The play describes a royal court in either Alar or Carcosa (if the former, then Carcosa is a mysterious, ghostly city across a lake or sea from it) featuring such figures as Camilla, Cassilda, Aldones, Thale and Naotalba. A mysterious Stranger wearing a Pallid Mask (possibly also known as *The Phantom of Truth*) stalks the city streets. The King In Yellow, who may be the Stranger, attends a masked ball at the palace and claims not be wearing a mask, presaging some sort of disaster. In the real world, the Castaigne and Atheling families are tainted by the play and/or Carcosa – which may be on the verge of forcing its way through into our world – along with a variety of artistic types and possibly people bearing the names of characters from the play. A secretive Brotherhood serves the King and may be locked in a secret war with the Migo.

However, there are other interpretations. The King may be a human mask of Hastur or Nyarlathotep, and Hastur might even be the very force of entropy rather than a tentacle Great Old One. Carcosa could be a primordial human or prehuman city or an alien world. The Mythos may be horrific, fantastic, surreal – even realistic. Indeed, it can be anything you want it to be. The stories, poems and artwork in this issue should give you some idea of the variety of interpretations that exist. Read on at your own risk...

Dreams of the Yellow King

By Dirk Holland

I had the dream again last night.

It's the one with the city with the empty streets. I'm all alone, walking down mist-sheathed, cobbled streets. Pus-yellow tendrils of choking smog slither about my limbs, as if seeking a purchase on my flesh or clothing with their clammy tips so as to pull me down into some abyssal deep. I pull on through.

I find myself in a park, overgrown and uncared for. Trees and shrubs and grass all withered and dying, as if the night here, in my dream, were unyielding in its grips, their leaves crisp and yellowed.

Approaching a mound, I begin to slow in fear. There is something not quite right about it. It looks like the outline of a sleeper beneath a sheet. I knew what it was and recoiled from it in disgust. The sheet moved, *undulated*; I dared look no closer.

And, then, the Yellow King is standing before me, mouthing blasphemies through his waxy lips. His tattered robes flutter lightly in a breeze I cannot feel and he speaks to me of my innermost hopes and fears. Slowly, his make-like countenance moves closer to mine...

That's when I awake.

The Doctor taps his pen on his notebook as I finish my description, then scribbles some sort of comment down. He asks me questions. He wants to know what blasphemies the figure is mouthing. He wants to know what my hopes and fears are. I hate his probing.

"Hildred," he says, "how can I help you if you won't help yourself?"

I had the dream again last night.

"Now, I know what it is that the figure demands. The figure represents me: that explains why it knows so much about me... It is my kingship, my sovereignty. It demands that I take up my rightful throne. This I must do - I cannot deny it.

I have arrayed my forces and rallied my troops. With the armies, none shall stand in my way as I re-establish the rule of my dynasty; a rule so long denied.

I killed Doctor Krycek today. He refused to believe me. Refused to acknowledge my right to rule. I will show him. I will rule again - master of all I survey. I shall become the Yellow King, master of the worlds of man. I shall triumph.

The patient expired last night in his sleep. While I cannot know for certain, it is interesting to speculate as to the identity of the thing that is the mound concealed beneath a blanket of bugs: Could it be that he finally dared to look closely and discovered that it was he himself lying there? Could the culmination of such a dream have killed him?

I can never know, but I can be sure that the criminally-insane patient who called himself Hildred Castaigne is finally dead.

Signed,

Dr. Robert Krycek

Ends

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(Atlantean Publishing/Carrion Blue 555)*

A Terrible Thing

A 312pp paperback of Carcosa Mythos fiction from Carrion Blue 555 in conjunction with Atlantean Publishing.

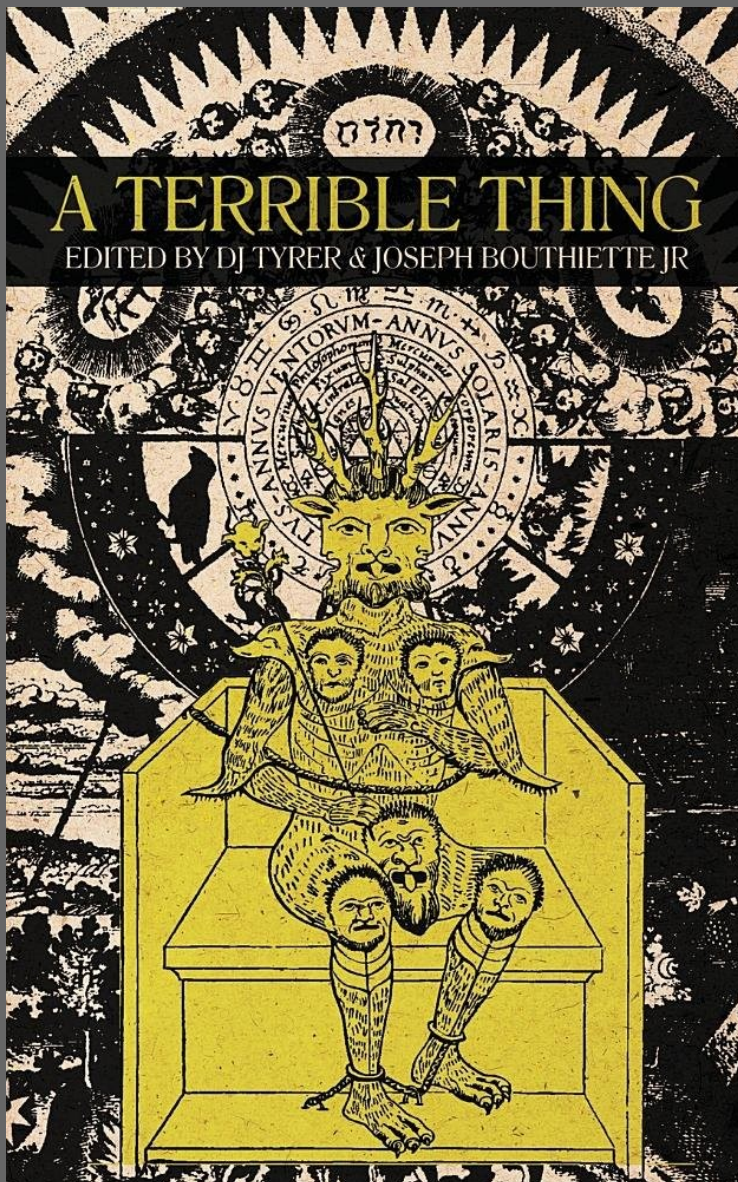
Available to order from [Amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk) and [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or direct from DJ Tyrer at Atlantean Publishing in the UK for £12.95 (including P&P).

Authors include Cardinal Cox, DS Davidson, Glynn Owen Barrass, David Conyers, Steve Sneyd, Neal Wilgus and more.

Fade Into The Future

By DJ Tyrer

The gay 'nineties give way to another age
That recoils in shock from years of decadence
Burning the Play, refusing to turn the page
Return to the chill fold of normality
Seek sanctuary in perverse penitence
And the bland embrace of banality
Bright yellow advertising posters fade beige
Shunned due to a senseless sense of diffidence
Now that none dare to step out upon the stage
Surrendering individuality
To act a part in the Play's dark confluence
Of sin and seductive sensuality



Sylvia's Pictures

By DJ Tyrer

Sylvia sits alone in her room, drawing. She is up there with her pencils and her pastels as much as we will let her and more besides. Sylvia is obsessed with drawing and it is always the same image. Over and over. I don't know if she's disturbed, but it disturbs me.

Sylvia isn't my daughter. I'm not sure if that excuses my unease towards her or if it makes me a bad person for not trying harder. Sometimes, I feel like the wicked stepmother. Sylvia's mother was Peter's first wife, Cassie. She disappeared about a year after Sylvia was born. I met Peter when Sylvia was eight and we married a year later; two years ago – Cassie having been declared dead. She probably was. Peter admitted she was eccentric and I'd always guessed that was a euphemism for insane. In my darker moments, I sometimes wondered if Sylvia was mad like her mother.

Always the same image. Slight details in the background might change, but Sylvia draws the same figure in the same childish pose over and over. She'd drawn it repeatedly, almost ritually, ever since Peter first brought me to meet her – in that first introduction, Sylvia had been down on the floor of her room compulsively scribbling; she barely lifted her head to acknowledge me. Tidying her room once when she was at school, I discovered a cache of them, going back, ever cruder into early years. She brings them home from school, draws them in her exercise book; sometimes the teachers worry about her.

Her pictures have never really bothered Peter much. I guess that when he was bringing her up alone he was grateful for the peace and quiet. Now, he delegates that side of life to me and, as long as Sylvia isn't any trouble, is disinclined to worry. She's never any real trouble, if you ignore her problems at school, her preference for doodling over working, her lack of interest. But, she never does anything really bad. Just draws.

When I first saw the pictures, I assumed they were meant to be her mother, that she was trying to perpetuate an idea of her. I think that is what Peter thought, probably still does. It was a natural assumption: the figure looked rather like a woman in a dress and her missing mother was an obvious candidate. It wasn't a woman.

"It's the Raggedy Man," Sylvia told me when I asked. "He lives way off across the sea and he took Mummy away. One day, he'll take me away."

I asked Peter, but he had no idea. It wasn't a friend of Cassie's that she might have a memory of, nor a character in some bedtime story he'd told her. He didn't think talk of being taken away was anything to worry about.

"She's probably just talking about death," he said. "You see what she's like; she's my little Goth girl."

That was true enough: Sylvia always wore a black dress and black shoes. She even wore black as a sullen bridesmaid at our wedding. The only actual colour she ever wore was a bright yellow bow in her washed-out blonde hair that had belonged to her mother. She loves that bow: she would shriek and yell if I took it from her to wash it.

The figure in her pictures was yellow, too, with the occasional dash of red. The Raggedy Man wore a ragged robe and had a white face with just two black dots for eyes. Sometimes, he stood alone on a sheet of blank paper; at other times, Sylvia would add an expanse of blue to represent the sea or a sort of castle in yellow that she said was his palace. Despite the bright colour she employed, the figure had a sombre, sinister aspect: in that, the figure reminded me of Sylvia. She has a sombre countenance and hauntingly-adult eyes that, I admit, I find sinister.

I've tried all sorts of things to distract Sylvia from her art, but nothing works. I've tried to get her to draw other things, press flowers, do sport, read books – even watch TV – but nothing works. All she does is draw.

I've got some news for her, though. Cautiously, I climb the stairs. I don't know why she makes me feel so nervous. It's silly. She's just a little girl. I can hear her humming something: *Beautiful Dreamer*, I think.

"Sylvia," I say as I enter her bedroom. She falls silent.

She doesn't look up. There's the slightest twitch of her head. That's how she acknowledges my presence. She will only look up or speak to me if I really press her.

"Sylvia, I have something to tell you."

She ignores me.

I repeat myself.

"What?" She still doesn't raise her head and her tone speaks of her annoyance at me distracting her from her work.

"Come sit with me on the bed."

"I'm busy." She is scribbling furiously, colouring in a picture of the Raggedy Man.

"Sylvia, please, put down your pens for a minute and come sit with me."

With a sort of whole-body shrug, Sylvia slowly lays down her pencil and stands, steps over to the bed and sits beside me, leaving a twelve-inch gap to prevent intimacy. She sits bolt upright, rigid, hands clasped tightly in her lap, eyes downcast, the image of a Victorian portrait.

I scoot over to her and slip an arm around her shoulders. Sylvia's already stiff body somehow manages to stiffen even more at my touch.

"Sylvia, your Daddy and I are going to have a baby. I'm pregnant, you see, and you're going to have a little brother or sister. Isn't that wonderful?"

Somehow, maintaining her stiffness, she shrugs, but still says nothing.

"Which would you like, darling?" I ask, using my cheeriest voice. "A baby brother or a baby sister?"

"It doesn't matter," she tells me in a hoarse whisper. I hate it when she talks like that; it's a horrible voice, like an old woman's.

"Oh, sure it does, Sylvia. I know it will mean some big changes, but I hope you'll be happy about it."

She shakes her head. "No, it doesn't matter because the Raggedy Man will come to take me away soon." She pauses for just a moment. "You and Daddy better watch out or he might get you."

I can't help but shiver. "And, will he take us away, too?" I ask.

Another shake of the head and she tells me, "No, he'll just get you."

"Okay, that's enough, young lady. I don't like you speaking to me like that. You need to respect me and your father. You need to stop this childishness."

She stands and pulls away from me. It's the fastest I've ever seen her move. She spins around and thrusts her head out at me. Her eyes blaze from her pallid face, her features a mask of loathing.

"You're not my mother, you're nothing! My mother was a princess, but you, you're nothing! Soon, I'll join her and leave this... this... place behind! I hate you! I hate you! Get out of my room and leave me alone! Get out! Get out!"

I do. I stumble out, tears running down my face, a mixture of anger and fear surging inside me. I stumble down the stairs and wait, shivering, sobbing, for Peter to come home. Above, Sylvia sits alone in her room, drawing; I can hear the scratching sound of pencils being dragged across paper with great rapidity.

When, finally, Peter arrives home, he refuses to be drawn on his daughter's behaviour.

“She’s jealous, that’s all,” he says. “She’s an only child and, suddenly, her step-mum’s pregnant and she worries about the baby getting all the attention. I mean, it’s not as if you and she really get on. She’s Daddy’s Special Girl and she resents you for getting in the way.”

“I try, Peter. I’ve tried so hard.”

“I’m not saying you don’t, but maybe you just need to try a little harder, eh?” He yawns, and changes the subject. “Right, now, supper; then, bed.”

The only reason I don’t throw down his meal and storm off to bed is that I still feel a twinge of irrational fear of going back upstairs, getting closer to her. Suddenly, I realise that I hate the girl.

In the coming weeks, my belly swells and so does the litany of complaints from the school. Suddenly, Sylvia is no longer the moody little girl who prefers to be an unnoticed shadow. Not any more. Perhaps she’s striking back at bullies; perhaps it’s the hormones of adolescence. Frankly, I don’t care. All I know is that she’s awful.

“She hit another girl,” Peter says, reading the latest letter from the school. “I just don’t know what’s gotten into her.”

“She’s a vile little girl,” I say.

Peter looks at me, aghast. “Sally!”

“It’s true. I know you think of her as your Little Princess and all that nonsense, but you don’t have to put up with her as much as I do. All she does, day in and day out, is scribble those awful pictures. If she deigns to speak to me, it’s bile. I guess she plays up in school because they don’t let her draw.”

He sniffs. “She’s just artistic, that’s all.”

“Artistic?” I laugh.

“Yes. She’s had some very good reports from her art teacher; and, have you seen her pictures? They’re really good. They put me in mind of that artist, oh, you know the guy, did a lot of yellow... Scott – Steve Scott.”

It’s my turn to sniff. “He was a lousy artist.”

“If you say so. Regardless, she’s getting good.”

“If *you* say so,” I retort.

“You’re just emotional because you’re pregnant.”

My hand falls to my bump. “Oh, yes, it’s all the baby’s fault.”

“Hey, I’m not saying –”

“Whatever. I’m going to bed.” I started to stand, then pause, thinking of Sylvia. “No, I’m going to sit outside.”

“It’s cold outside.”

“I don’t care!”

It *is* cold, but I sit out on the bench on the decking anyway. From above, through the narrow opening of Sylvia’s window, I can hear her humming *Beautiful Dreamer* again and I wonder just what it is she dreams of: does the Raggedy Man lurk within her dreams?

There’s a sudden creak, the sound of the gate at the bottom of the garden, and I jump at it. I look up and stare into the shadows, expecting to see the Raggedy Man standing there! There’s nothing there, of course, just the gate swinging slightly in the breeze and the branches of the willow swaying. No spooky figure. Why would I think that? Am I going mad? Is Peter right to blame me? To blame the baby?

I shiver, from the chill, I tell myself, and decide to retreat inside. I wish I knew what to do.

More time passes and my due date approaches and Sylvia is suspended after attempting to stab another girl in the eye with a paintbrush.

“She ripped my picture,” she says, as if that justifies it.

Peter coos over her and I just don't have the energy to care any more.

"I wash my hands of her," I mutter. Neither seems to hear me.

Sylvia retreats to her room to draw. Peter and her art teacher are right about one thing: she is getting better at her art. I avoid going in her room now, or looking in: her portraits of the Raggedy Man seem disturbingly lifelike to me, if a figure in flowing rags and a pale mask can be said to be lifelike. As long as she stays in there, stays away from me and the baby, I can just about tolerate her. At times, I fantasize about leaving Peter, leaving her behind.

Eventually, the baby arrives. My all-too-brief stay in hospital is a wonderful respite. Peter doesn't bring Sylvia.

We have a nursery ready, but I insist the cot stay in our room for now: I can't tell Peter, but I don't trust Sylvia. Might she hurt Lisa?

She certainly shows no interest in her new sister. Just keeps on drawing, alone, in her room.

"Don't you want to see Lisa?" Peter asks.

"No," she tells him without looking up.

The next morning when I open my eyes, it is to see the Raggedy Man standing in our bedroom doorway: Sylvia has recreated him, life-size, across several sheets of paper that she has stuck to the door.

"I did it for Lisa," she explains, gaze downcast, but with the slightest twitch of a smile that tells me the scare was deliberate. She wanted to frighten me.

Peter pats her head, indulgently, a blind fool.

"He's nearly here," Sylvia whispers to me as she leaves.

Shuddering, I leave as quickly as I can, return to our bedroom and tear down the hideous portrait; rip it to shreds. I fall to the floor sobbing, which wakes Lisa and starts her crying. Peter is downstairs and doesn't care.

The next day, Peter leaves on business. Why won't he listen to me? Why won't he stay? Why do I stay?

That night, the bedroom door creaks, rousing me to wakefulness.

"He's here," I hear a hoarse whisper from the door.

I look up to see the silhouette of Sylvia framed in the moonlight. I hear a footstep on the stair. I pray she means her father has returned early, but I know she doesn't.

Lifting Lisa from her cot, I hold her close, sobbing, silently praying that He will leave us alone. There is the sound of swishing rags, then a shrill cry, then the house falls silent. Is Sylvia gone? Is He?

I daren't look. I daren't move at all.

I hardly dare breathe.

Ends

*Originally published in **Voices From A Coma***

*For more information on **The King In Yellow** and **The Yellow Mythos**,
try **The Yellow Site***



Help! Someone's Trying to Kill Me – and I Fear it's My Husband!

By DS Davidson

A Cold Play CD was playing as the sports car shot along the Italian lanes. Connie clung on for dear life; it felt as if the car were being driven by a lunatic.

"Please, Gino, slow down!" she cried over the words of the song that were being whipped away by the wind.

"What's the point of a sports car, darling, if you can't race along?"

"I want to enjoy our honeymoon," she shouted back, "not spend it in traction – or a coffin."

"Spoilsport!" But, he did slow a little and she felt the nausea dissipate a tiny bit.

"There it is," Gino said a moment later, gesticulating wildly, "Castrocarcosa."

That was their destination. Apparently, his ancestors had come from the area before moving to Turin, which was where she'd first met him: Connie had been interning at a fashion house and Gino had been an investment broker. He'd swept her off her feet and followed her to England when her internship had ended – the internet allowing him to pursue his trades at a distance – and, a year later, they'd been married.

Castrocarcosa was a hill-town, one of many in this region of Italy, perched atop vertical cliffs far above the surrounding countryside. Connie felt a little nauseous as she gazed up at it, but that may have been the lingering effects of their speed. Whitewashed houses with red-slate roofs rose almost as if part of the hill, amongst them the spire of a church, and a little above them was the fortified building, the castle, that was now a hotel and where they could be staying.

Within minutes, the car was crawling its way up the narrow road carved up the side of the hill, Connie was thankful that Gino was taking it slowly; there was a low stone wall on the outside edge, but it seemed it would be horribly easy to plunge over the side. After noting that, Connie kept her gaze fixed, through narrowed eyes, firmly on the dashboard, saying a silent prayer to the God she didn't really believe in.

The car came to a halt and she dared to look around: They were parked in a narrow courtyard in front of the castle-turned-hotel. The building formed two sides of the courtyard and a third comprised some wall and the roof of some lower building. She glanced, a little nervously, over her shoulder and was rewarded with a glorious skyscape of wondrously-sculpted clouds.

"It's beautiful," she breathed.

Gino smiled at her. "I knew you'd like it." Then, he said, "Let's sign in."

He fetched their luggage and carried it in. Connie lingered a little longer, enjoying the view, then drifted in after him.

The lobby was decorated with a dark panelling that had a hint of honey to it and an unpatterned yellow wallpaper.

Gino tapped the desk-bell and a woman appeared through a door and greeted them with a smile. She chirped a greeting in rapid, provincial Italian that Connie, never as good as she should have been with the language, couldn't follow. Her husband seemed to have no problem and, in moments, had signed the register and the woman was leading them up to their room.

Although she'd felt a little unnerved at ascending higher still, the view from their suite of rooms was amazing and roused no vertigo in her; it was as if they were floating amongst the clouds.

"It's wonderful!" she exclaimed, clapping her hands.

Gino smiled and hugged her. "Only the best for you, baby."

"Right," she said, "I'm going to have a shower and, then, have a lie down; I'm exhausted."

"Sounds good to me," he told her, grinning.

"Hold your horses; there'll be time enough for that later. First, I need to recover from the car journey." She rubbed her hip. "You were throwing me about."

"Sorry."

"But, tonight..." she added as she headed into the en suite.

"Bella! Well, I'm going to go have a drink while I'm waiting. Ciao!"

"Ciao!"

Connie showered, then, wrapped in a fluffy yellow towel dropped onto the bed with a contented sigh. She reached for her phone, planning to email friends and family, but she couldn't get reception.

"Oh, poor," she muttered and chucked her phone onto the chair. She'd been hoping to google the village. She'd loaded a couple of 'giallo' novels on her kindle, but that was in her bag and she couldn't be bothered to look for it. Oh, well, she thought, she might as well lay back and relax. The bed was soft and inviting.

Connie was dozing enjoyably when a knock roused her.

"Yes?"

There was no reply, but the knock came again.

"Gino, is that you? Have you forgotten your key?" Or, maybe it was housekeeping, she thought. Whoever it was, they were keeping quiet.

She rolled out of bed with an exaggerated groan and padded across to the door and opened it.

It had only opened about six inches when a yellow-leather gloved hand thrust itself through the gap, a knife clutched tightly in its grasp. With a swift movement, it slashed the blade towards her arm.

Connie shrieked and leapt backwards, falling to the floor and banging against a chest of drawers. Pain flared through her arm, but she was too busy looking at the door, which was opening further, to care.

She kicked at the door and forced the hand to retract. A second kick and it slammed shut, the lock clicking, and she let out a sob of relief.

Connie looked down at the bloody gash on her arm and began to cry. She tugged a corner of the towel she was wearing free and pressed it to the wound, a red stain soaking into it.

She was still pressing down on the wound when Gino returned. He looked down at her and the jaunty grin vanished from his face.

He let out a string of Italian exclamations and dropped to his knees beside her, demanding to know what had happened as he examined her wound.

Connie gasped out her story, but he hushed her and nodded at the corner of the chest of drawers, which had a smear of blood on it.

"You hurt yourself there. You fell and bashed yourself."

"But, there was a knife..."

"You said you were asleep. You must have been dreaming, got out of bed and stumbled and fell."

"But..."

"Darling, we're the only guests and nobody's out to kill you."

"But..."

"Shush. I'll fetch the first-aid box and you have another lie down."

Reluctantly, Connie sat on the bed and waited for him to return and bandage her arm.

"We'll go and have some dinner just now. Maybe your blood sugar is low or something."

Gino was solicitous enough, but she found herself growing annoyed at his failure to believe her. The way he talked so matter-of-factly, she found she was beginning to doubt herself. By the time they descended for supper, Connie was no longer in a good mood.

The woman, who seemed to run the hotel single-handedly, managed to improve her humour a little by worrying about her arm; Connie chose not to mention the hand. She served up heaped servings of a curiously-shaped yellow pasta, three-limbed shapes coiled strangely upon Connie's fork, topped with shredded meat in a Bolognese-like sauce and grated cheese. It was delicious and succeeded in further improving her mood.

"The local speciality," the woman said in heavily-accented English as she carried the bowl away.

"Could you tell me a bit more about the town?" Connie asked between mouthfuls.

"Leaflet," said the woman, disappearing for a moment and returning with a three-column folded flyer printed on yellow paper that she placed beside Connie's plate. A coat-of-arms was printed on the front, with what appeared to be a chestnut tree, and a motto in Latin that seemed to say "It is a terrible thing..."

An equally-delicious ice-cream followed, then they returned to their room. While Gino took his turn in the shower, Connie reclined on the bed and read through the leaflet. There wasn't much in it and the English was stilted and a little difficult to read.

The account described the foundation of the town and castle by the princes Asturio and Ali and the rule of the house of Aldones, before they were replaced by the Castaigne counts. That brought her to a halt: Gino was a Castaigne – she was now one by marriage – was he related to the counts? She read on and learnt they had fallen from power after allying themselves to the Bonapartes, Castrocarsa eventually passing to the new Italian state.

Intrigued, she reached out for her phone, but still couldn't get a signal anywhere in the room. Gino's phone was on top of the chest of drawers – her blood had been cleaned off before their return and a bottle of champagne and two flutes had awaited them – and she decided to try it, see if she could get a signal.

The phone was locked, but she'd watched him tap in his password and had it open in a moment. She called up google and was surprised when it opened up with a page in Italian that seemed to be about wills. She ran translate – the page was one where you could post questions for lawyers to answer – and read it. Gino had asked about inheritance law and a lawyer had replied:

'Marriage will have invalidated any previous will, if one existed. Unless you write a new will, your spouse, and any children, will now inherit your estate.'

He must be thinking about me, just in case something happens to him, she thought. Only, Gino had never been the sort to think the worst. If anything, he was rather lackadaisical. Then, she remembered the gloved hand and shivered... It couldn't be, could it?

She shivered, again despite the warmth, logged out of the phone and returned it to where it had been.

She was being ridiculous; wasn't she?

Her new husband exited the en suite, a towel wrapped about his waist, and joined her on the bed. She refrained from asking the question that had been on her mind minutes before. Too many others had replaced it.

"Ready to make our honeymoon one to remember?" he asked.

"Of course," she said, smiling, but there was little passion driving her and their lovemaking was mechanical and staid. Not that Gino seemed disappointed, which only stirred further worry for her and left her tossing and turning for some time before sleep claimed her.

Connie woke from a nightmare of being pursued through medieval Castrocarsa pursued by what seemed to be some sort of bishop in tattered yellow robes, which, as dreams so often did, made little sense when she awoke. She was alone in the bed. Moonlight streamed in through the window, eerily bright.

"Gino?" she sat up and looked about. He wasn't in the room and the door to the en suite was open wide enough to see he wasn't in there either. "Gino?"

Then, she saw the door to the passage was open. Suddenly, all thoughts of it being his hand vanished and she began imagine her husband had fallen prey to the psychopath.

Connie slid out of bed and looked about the dark room for something she could use as a weapon. She settled on the half-drained bottle of champagne: it would do as a club.

The corridor was dark – surely it should be lit? – and she really didn't want to step out into it. But, she couldn't stop thinking about Gino. She called his name softly, but there was only silence. Where was he?

She thought she could recall the direction of the stairs and headed that way for want of a plan. Perhaps he was down in the bar; he did like a drink.

Behind her, Connie heard a swish of movement, like a skirt. She glanced back. Although it was dark, the moonlight that shone through her open bedroom door and a window at the corridor's end reflected off a pale figure and glinted off the knife blade it carried. It was a person, tall, probably a man, dressed in what appeared to be a light-coloured trench coat and a matching wide-brimmed hat that was pulled down to cover their face. The figure was moving swiftly towards her. She dropped the champagne bottle and turned and ran.

Connie screamed her husband's name as she headed for the stairs. She darted around the corner and found them. She could see the yellowish glow of electric light below and ran down the stairs two at a time, almost losing her footing in her haste.

"Gino-o-o-o!" There was no response, not from her husband or the woman, nothing. Terror was rising from her stomach to her chest, threatening to drown her.

At least, she thought, she had light, now.

Then, she revised her thankfulness to revulsion: The body of the woman who ran the hotel lay on the landing below her, gutted, blood and intestines spilling out to form a pattern that was horribly reminiscent of the pasta she'd eaten that evening. Bile rose into the back of her throat and vomit escaped with what should've been a scream.

She stumbled to a halt, unwilling to try and step over the corpse. She was still for a moment, fear and revulsion battling within her. She didn't even think to wipe her chin.

Connie turned and ran back up the stairs. Her pursuer was almost at this floor, as she ran down the corridor, trying doors, looking for some place to hide; they were all locked. She swore in English and Italian: she was trapped.

Her pursuer was drawing near. As she cowered beside a window overlooking the car-park, she could see he wore a trench coat and hat the same colour as his gloves and the robes of the grotesque figure from her dream.

He lunged at her, but she managed to catch his knife arm. He grabbed at her with his other hand and they struggled for a moment. He was bigger and stronger than her and clearly as determined to kill her as she was to live; much longer and he would overpower her.

Connie tried to remember what her self-defence instructor had said: Use the attacker's power against them. She dropped and twisted in the direction of his thrust, adding his momentum to her move, throwing him over her and crashing out through the window.

There was no sound as he plummeted to his death.

Connie lay there for what seemed an age, sucking in deep breaths and attempting to still what felt like a butterfly attempting to explode through her chest.

Eventually, she was able to swear again and that's when she knew for certain she was still alive.

She ascended back to the top floor where they had their room and began her search for Gino, hoping he was neither the killer who'd plunged through the window nor his victim. She kept calling his name and checking every unlocked room to no avail, then descended through the lower floors, searching, until she came to the nauseating, gutted corpse of the woman.

"Oh, Gino..." she moaned, still unwilling to proceed.

She ought, she realised, go get his phone and see if she could get a signal and call for help. But, what if he was lying somewhere, bleeding to death? She had to find him and help him.

Gingerly, she stepped over the corpse and proceeded to check that floor and the ones below. Still no sign of him, not even in the bar. She poured herself a large red wine and swallowed it down, hoping it might steady her.

She needed to get help, whatever had happened to her husband. Even if he was, as she feared, her attacker. She remembered seeing a public phone box shortly before they reached the hotel. She had a plan; she had hope, no matter how tenuous.

She headed outside and looked about. There was no sign of the yellow figure, who should have been smeared across the flagstones. She felt sick. She ran down the steep lane to the phone box, cobbles cold beneath her bare feet, trying not to think about how high up she was, or where her attacker might be or who he was.

Connie seized the receiver and punched in the emergency number.

"Polizia," said a male voice.

"Help!" she cried. "Someone's trying to kill me – and I fear it's my husband!" Then, she realised she was shouting in English. Before she could repeat it in Italian, the line went dead.

She looked around: There was the killer!

Connie thrust the phone box door open, knocking the figure back, gaining her the space to run past and escape. He slashed at her and she felt pain blaze down her left arm.

She ran back up towards the hotel, screaming for help. Maybe, if she could reach the car... Except, she needed the key... She ran past it and back inside, pausing to slam the door shut and bolt it.

A window smashed as she headed for the stairs.

This time, she didn't pause at the corpse, just hopped over it; she didn't care any more.

"Connie! Connie, is that you?" The voice was unexpected and made her halt. It seemed to be coming from the floor below and was unmistakably her husband's.

"Gino? Gino!"

She ran down to the floor below. There he was! Gino was on the landing in his t-shirt and boxers, a little bloodied but alive.

"Oh, Connie, are you okay? I was attacked, but got away. The hotelier is dead."

"He slashed my arm, but..." Her voice trailed away as she noticed he appeared to be limping and was holding his body awkwardly, as if injured. "What happened to you?"

"Uh, um, I took a tumble down the stairs. I was out cold for a bit, which is why I didn't come when you called earlier."

He was lying; she knew it, and that could only mean one thing. Screw the keys, she thought, she'd run for it.

Gino stepped towards her, but she shoved him away and ran back downstairs and out into the car park. If she ran down the hill, maybe she could run away across country, or, perhaps, find help.

Suddenly, the pale figure lunged out of the shadows and lunged at her with the knife, plunging it into her shoulder. She gasped, but kept going.

Then, she lost her footing, going tip over top as she tumbled down the steep lane, her scream echoing after her.

Connie came to a halt and picked herself up. She barely staggered a pace or two before she heard Gino calling her name. She glanced back and saw him, still in his t-shirt and boxers; he held a knife.

Still stunned, she didn't have the chance to react before he plunged it into her chest, again and again.

"Sorry, mio amore, but I need your trust fund; I'm all tapped out."

"Bastard..."

She slumped to the blood-slick cobbles, but before her sight faded, she saw movement behind him: a pale figure with a knife in its hand. Gino screamed and blood splashed down his chin. Somehow, she knew he'd been judged and found unworthy.

She seemed to hear Cold Play coming from somewhere and felt strangely at peace.

Then, she died, leaving behind the town of Castrocarcosa and entering the eternal city of which it was the merest shadow. It was, she thought, a terrible thing...

Ends



Holes in the Northern Ice

By Kevin Morley

Cold eyes stared at me and no matter which way I moved, they followed. Giant zits and oozing sores lined the faintly glowing mass in anything but a linear fashion. An unholy blackness seemed to suck light from the room and I could feel my vision drawn to the emptiness of that void, the chaotic music of its vapid blankness soothing my mind as a drug might.

I couldn't break my stare. Thoughts pounded through my head like runaway trains but I just could not bring myself to look away. Certainly, the eyes of the creature seemed to pin me to my spot, as I said, and it didn't have just the two of them. Those eyes visible from my position seemed beyond count.

The words above the picture, written in slanting, uneven hand said Shoggoth Mating Area. Really, as if anything that fetid could find a mate. Though, a darker truth lurked in the background of the statement; there were more than one of the creatures.

It took near superhuman strength for me to tear my vision from the poster. John had thought it funny to hang the menacing creature in the Company break room. He laughed and cajoled the rest of us, too. I suppose it gave him some glory, some sense of ownership over fear, to make us squirm and then saunter about as if he owned the place.

The man was an utter tool.

Rig 212 was an exploratory drilling Rig that had, by chance, or foul twist of fate, found a rich reservoir of oil above the Arctic Circle and well away from anything remotely human. The simple complex was in the process of expanding its elementary fifteen-man crew and initial plant and platform into a state-of-the-art complex capable of hosting forty full-time employees with room for sixty to stay on station for extended surveys and forays even further into the biting cold.



Truth be told, the cold wasn't as bad as it had been thirty years ago. At least, that's what the old-timers said. But anybody who has been on a job for long knows that the work done now and the suffering borne by the riggers today never compared with the trials endured by the pioneers of the craft. Of course, as I saw it, that was true in almost any field of work. I've got a litany of correspondences from friends across the planet all saying the same thing.

So Mr. Lovecraft's Shoggoth stared at us and we, in turn, eyed John. For the first three months of our tour, we made a ritual of the routine. Three shifts of workers rotating through checking switches, dials, and gauges before coming back to a beleaguered break room to microwave one of the numerous frozen dinners we had as supply, and then sleep it off before going back at it tomorrow.

We took turns on the exploratory work, though. Only three men were ever needed on a shift and that left the other six either on an off day, on patrol around the rig, or on exploratory search. The lucky devils, if braving the bitter cold and soulless wind counted as luck, that drew the exploratory work got to take the closest thing to real food on site; MREs. Of course, if they could start a fire while on walkabout they could have a hot meal. If they couldn't get their chemical stoves to light then they would eat cold rations from a cold utensil while shivering in a cold tent.

John had left on his rotation of exploratory detail six days ago. The rest of us had thought about taking down his poster and hanging it above his bunk for him to snuggle with when he got back. John was the kind of guy who loved to play a joke and laugh at another's distress but couldn't stomach the reverse well at all. And since he was bigger than most in general and everyone on Rig 212 in particular, it just created a sullen situation of sit and take it.

Two days ago, the other three members of John's team returned. They had stumbled in, half dressed and all mad, with exposure providing a nice side-dish of hypothermia for the three of them. Then the radio went down and the rig's power plant suffered a blown motor in one of the shafts. As a courtesy, the wind picked up another 15 knots and stopped gusting as it slid into a full-time howl.

Of course, humans being humans, we argued about who should go and rescue John, not as punishment but as a point of pride. Most of us thought he would have died of exposure already anyway, but miners are tough folks and we all wanted a chance to prove to our compatriots that we could get a job done where others had failed. Strangely, the fact that those that failed sat rocking in a silent catatonic state or chained to a bed and screaming almost as loud as the malevolent wind outside didn't faze us at all.

And so I found myself staring at John's dark-humoured Shoggoth and wondering exactly what lay in store for me for I – I and two others – would leave to fetch John back to the rig within the hour.

As I stepped through the exterior door and into the waiting embrace of Mother Nature, she tore the very breath from my lungs. The trees all bowed away from the wind in silent supplication to its fury as well. Snow swirled in hellish little vortexes of biting cold, the frozen crystals pinging off our parkas like pebbles.

We trudged forward, barely able to follow the windblown and drift-covered tracks of our returned fellows as we snaked our way back along their march of terror-filled angst. There appeared places in their path where the wind had whisked the snow away, leaving the exposed tundra to blink into the uncaring sky.

In places, these exposures represented depressions from footprints, some few of which collected pools of water. My mind churned at that. The cold should have frozen them over entirely, let alone allowed a booted imprint in the permafrost. The ground under the drill site was solid as a rock for several feet of frost-frozen earth.

I motioned for my fellows to stop. Dickson and Landers turned inquisitive eyes to me as I bent to one of the boot-heel pools. Biting on the fingers of a glove I extracted my hand from its warm comfort and shared it with the bitter wind. She howled in glee, the sound carrying across the barren tundra and tossed at us like some school-yard insult.

The cold bit deep, but as I lowered my hand to the tundra it passed through a barrier of some sort. I know not how to describe that eerie feeling of clawing, blustering cold there one moment and then, of a sudden, not. Below the maelstrom, the air was warm and still as a grave. I could see the flakes of snow and ice on my hand that had gathered in the moment of its release from my glove as they melted and dripped to the ground.

I stared in marvel at this strange curiosity, this mismatch of science and observation that defied understanding. In transfixed wonder, I muttered the most lucid statement I could. “Huh.” My utterance fell upon ears curious for information but minds as bereft as mine about what to do with such. I removed my hand, passing it once again through the calmness near the earth and into the maelstrom that threatened to swallow us whole. The liquid on my fingers froze before I could get the glove back on, causing pain and cracking in my skin. Once I had the glove on, I flexed my fingers in their warm mitten to free them from Nature’s icy grip.

I thought the evidence worthy enough of digital capture so I snapped several photos with my phone, though I could send nothing anywhere, the forlorn north as devoid of cell towers as any other sign of life. My companions and I all looked at each other as if to say we should go back. None of us voiced that fear, each of us managing our internal war with machismo and trying to wear a face of nonchalance, and so we soldiered on into the unknown.

Gradually our trek into the north, or just to the west of north to be more accurate, became one of increasing trepidation. The wind changed on us, not in its direction or ferociousness, but certainly, in its texture, that feel and smell. No longer did it seem to bring with it the icy-blue scent of cold but

rather a more tropical stench of fetid decay. To say that the change alarmed us would entertain that demon that lurked in the back of our minds and we did not speak of it in any way.

The snow slowly stopped swirling and the ground squished under our feet. We knew we had transcended the norm. We could see it in each other's eyes and hear it in the unspoken words our faces clearly expressed. We had crossed some unknown threshold into a time or place we couldn't quite understand.

From the sodden and rotting tundra rose a stone dwelling of some malevolent design. It glistened in the clinging moisture of this otherworldly place with a doorway half again as large as anything typically human and hiding secrets we knew not of beyond its bowed and broken frame. A single set of footprints led to the portal. We followed them of course, trying to find the owner and rescue him if need be.

Around us, other mounds rose, some breaking through the vegetation of the ground to show slabs of soil-stained marble or stone, while others merely pushed at the turf from their subterranean haunts. We three, we brave few, followed in the footsteps of our friend and passed into the darkness beyond.

At first, we were overwhelmed with the dark. Then, as we turned on the flash-lights in our phones, the walls took on an illumination of their own. We saw there, in the faint indwelling luminescence, carvings of men worshipping and serving, indeed, enslaved to some strange creature. Much of the idolized form of the strange deity had since been hacked from the wall. Around our booted feet, pressed into the dust in places, lay the remnants of that carving.

We moved deeper into the lair, for we all felt that we had found the home of some foul beast. We spoke of the other things we saw and mumbled our interest and curiosity at the scripts and sculptures; we knew that we had crossed some point of demarcation when we entered this place and breathed life into these strange walls. We hoped to learn from our friend's mistake and then rescue him from whatever befell him here in the dark.

Johnny's path led us deeper still and we chanced upon a food wrapper and an odd pile of stone carvings and statuettes. The moment our lights touched the figurines they began to glow. Oddly, their faces changed expression as well. I'm certain it was a trick of the light since we had resigned ourselves to the glowing permanence of this place. We all felt certain that Johnny had set the statues in a pile as a glowing light source.

Downward we went, traversing the labyrinthine concourses in pursuit of our friend. When the path widened and the walls snaked away on both sides disappearing into the dark, it took us all by surprise for the path had seemed entirely uniform in its design. What little light we had only illuminated a small globe around us, but the walls ate it up anyway. Soon, a greenish-yellow glow meandered through the living veins within the stone as it crept left and right to encompass the entire room. The veins led heavenward as well and the roof of our cavern grew luminescent with the faint glow.

The ceiling depicted an awful conflagration that consumed many humans bent in subjugation to some deity. As the light continued ascending we saw it, presiding over all of the frescoed humans, a creature from nightmare. All around the rim of the dome, in excellent bas-relief reflected in the baleful green fire's circumnavigation, knelt other creatures like the one in the centre of the ceiling. By comparison, they seemed markedly smaller in stature and less dreadful, though any one of them would surely be a match for our search party.

So intent were we on the frescoes, stone work, and arcing greenish light that we overlooked certain peculiarities. Until we entered the temple room, for surely this must be such, there had proceeded from our backs a rush of air. Dust swirled at our steps and rose up in homage at the rushing air as well, marking our entry with a puffy cloud that soared into the room and spun about us trying to settle at our feet. It was at this time that the haunting wail from the centre of this subterranean temple overtook us.

There, pustules bursting and dripping from its barrel-like torso, stood a nightmare come to life. The creature had eyes everywhere. As we watched, several vanished and we could see them moving under its skin and bursting forth in residence where a recent pustule had broken and seeped. Indeed, each vacuole seemed to rotate from skin to pus-filled sore, to dripping malfeasance before one of the myriad eyes blinked its birthing through the slime.

I bent forward and gagged, hurling what little I had eaten into the dust that covered the floor. I noticed a smooth lump in the dust between my feet and pondered what might lay buried there. I heard Lander's voice, cracked and dry, say something of bones and then the shape before me became clearer in the ever growing light. And not just the one shape, but scattered bones and skulls of other lost souls covered in their timeless blanket of dusty decay. There must have been hundreds of them and my mind toyed with the idea that the ceiling's fresco depicted the events of this chamber.

When I stood again, I took in more of the ever brightening room and the scene around the creature. Aside from the bones and decay a figure lay slumped on the stone at the beast's feet. I could tell by the boots that it was Johnny. Tendrils or arms from the creature appeared to take root in Johnny's back and they undulated in their mindless work.

A swirl of the air rushing past us blew the dust around Johnny's head and I could see his face clearly in that wan light. The horror echoed in his eyes and frozen in his wordless silent scream echoed louder than any mortal sound I had ever heard. Landers fainted dead away on site of it and I confess a moment's unease as well.

When the full light of the room finally burst forth in its sickening greenish yellow cast, the milieu at its centre struck its final, inharmonious chord. In that moment, disgusting pustules, roaming eyes, and flapping arms all came together in a jarring resemblance to the picture hung in our break room.

I grabbed the parka of the moaning and consciously challenged Landers and forcibly dragged him to the doorway we had entered a moment before. Dickson grabbed her other shoulder and we raced

into the hallway and clamoured up the first flight of stairs. All around us, the hallway glimmered in its false light. The veins of light therein twisted within our minds into the very arms of the Shoggoth behind us.

Possibly, we may have screamed. It took longer in our ascent, or perhaps it felt that way since we were now burdened and no longer plying our curiosity to the subterranean wonder-turned-horror. The shrieks behind us multiplied and upon the dusty air, we could hear a slithering grind, like a knife on a whetstone, only multiplied by thousands.

We raced on, our lungs straining at the effort our bodies asked of them. When the air turned from dry dirt and dust to musky foulness, we knew we were close and hoped to see the half-light of pregnant clouds in a winter landscape. Then we were free and Landers started thrashing in our grasp so we set him loose to stand on his own. I am certain I saw my own panic reflected in his eyes as they stared at me.

Dickson and I grabbed him by the arms and sloshed through the rotting vegetation that clung to the ground as we crossed the strange temple's surroundings. The cold that wrapped us in its clutching grasp as we crossed over from whatever preternatural environment we had found and longed to forget. Johnny was gone to us, now, and we only hoped that what we found would stay hidden.

When we returned to our rig and shared our story, our comrades laughed at us; not those still in the medical wing, but our fellow miners who had drawn lots for the mission. The next day, a news article about thawing permafrost and gaping holes in Siberia appeared on our break room wall next to Johnny's poster. I didn't tell the others, but I could clearly see the right angles of construction protruding through the ground next to one of the holes

Ends



The Screams of the Solar Eclipses

By Mark Hudson

1900- From Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory, based in Washington, Came railroad cars loaded up with science equipment, heading to Wadesboro, North Carolina as a professional team to record The solar eclipse of that decade.

A man named Tom rigged cameras to seven telescopes, And made eight glass-plate negatives from eleven to fourteen Inches of the solar eclipse. This was cutting-edge technology For 1900.

But what was never mentioned in the records of that time Was a certain professor who looked at all the glass plates, And swore he could see the trace of an octopus-like creature In the negatives. He kept ranting and raving about it, and Finally they put him in an insane asylum for life.

What he saw was a preview of Cthulhu

1918-On June 8 there was an eclipse and an artist named Howard Russell Baker made a painting of the solar eclipse that was Very well-known.

But what was not well-known, rather hidden was a lesser known Artist named "Spud" Bud Chakowski, who did tons of paintings Of the solar eclipse with freakish aliens that looked like octopi.

He saw Cthulhu.

He was put in a mental hospital for life, and his paintings were Destroyed.

1925-the solar eclipse was most visibly seen from New York that Year, above 95th street in Manhattan. Most people did not See the octopi aliens, but a handful of people who were Destined to die did. Nobody could explain their deaths, They were ruled heart attacks. But the truth was they had The second sight to see the aliens approaching the earth In the solar eclipse.

July 9, 1945-As World war one was winding down, there was A solar eclipse a month before they bombed Hiroshima. A bunch of Nazis were taking a break from their duties To watch the solar eclipse, and they saw the aliens Coming in the sky. They played "Russian Roulette" and Shot themselves, thinking they were facing some Supernatural judgment day. They were thought to Have moved to Argentina, but their bodies never Really were recovered.

July 11, 1991-the main place the solar eclipse is viewed is from Hawaii, and Baja California. A bunch of naïve tourists are Standing by a volcano, and they look into the solar eclipse, And see the octopi aliens, and become convinced they Have upset the volcano God, Pele. Fifty of them jump Right into the volcano, dead and unaccounted for.

On September 28, 1995 Bill Clinton supervises the historic Peace agreement at the White House between Israel And Palestine. But it is not to last for long. On October 24, 1995, a solar eclipse begins in the Middle East, And the octopi aliens begin to descend into the Deserts, possessing the bodies of innocent Humans, and slowly starting to reverse the Process of peace among humans.

August 21, 2017

Tons of people went to Southern Illinois to get The best view of the solar eclipse. They stared Up into the sky with their special glasses. But spaceships, appeared, and octopi Aliens started shooting out of the Ships, and some people screamed, "I'm blind! I can't see!"

While others were attacked by the octopi Creatures, and dragged into the ships. The time had come. They'd been spying on us for longer than We thought. And we had no defence against looking At their deadly tentacles that strangled Us, but cheap sunglasses ordered from Amazon.



The Eye in the Darkness

By DS Davidson

A single great eye
Unblinking
Staring out from the darkness
Of that abyssal void
Far, far below the surface of the earth
Wreathed in a mane
Of twitching tentacles
Grasping towards the light
Older than humanity
Older than the Earth
Older than time itself
It waits
For what, no sane mind knows

Originally published in **Cyaegha** fanzine

Tomes of Yore originally published in **Bard 97**
(Atlantean Publishing)

Tomes of Yore

By Aeronwy Dafies

I have heard tell of the tomes of yore
Books that held esoteric lore
Which were burnt long before
As they held dark words within
And were branded with the mark of sin
Being bound in human skin.
As much as necromancers might admire
They were condemned to a blazing fire
Built into a pyramidal pyre.
Between their covers was contained
Secrets better left unexplained
Or so the inquisitors maintained;
Secrets of an elder time
When men were preceded by slime
Secrets the reading of which is a crime;
Books revered by secret cults
And used to achieve mystic results
Using curious 'essential salts'.
Yet as the flames died
No matter how they tried
Their vision never lied:
There amongst the ashes, again
One vile tome did remain
That infamous one that drives men insane;
Yet today it is no more around
Too well-hidden to be found
Despite the tales that do abound
And thus we assume it exists no more
That forbidden book of elder lore
Just another lost tome of yore
No more can we read that tome of yore.





The Case of Charles Dexter Ward:

Will Immortal Human Beings Enter the Pantheon of the Old Ones?

By John A. DeLaughter

“...The more mystical phases of the letter, which he took to be some extravagant kind of symbolism, frankly baffled him; though he noted with a thrill of curiosity that the Biblical passage referred to – Job 14,14 – was the familiar verse, ‘If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, until my change come...’ (1).

To many, the certainty of classic cosmologies – a promised hereafter, life beyond death – has lost its lulling luster. The once soothing opiate that gave purpose to the powerless proletariat has lost its satiating potency.

H.P. Lovecraft, the consummate atheist and materialist, portrayed the cosmos as a multi-planed, series of infinite dimensions populated by near ageless entities whose towering intellects dwarf humanity’s comprehension. Mankind, plagued by ancestral superstitions, crude five-senses, a primitive hemispherical brain, and a limited lifespan remains an insect in comparison to the least of “The Old Ones.”

As a species, we have few options that help level the inter-galactic playing field.

In the Old West, the Colt single-action six-shooter was known as the “Equalizer”. No matter how big or small a person was, no matter how smart or dumb, no matter whether you were male or female, the Colt revolver made you the “Equal” of anyone else in a fight.

Given time, we terrestrial caterpillars may emerge from our ignorant slumber and blossom into some type of extraterrestrial butterflies, as the machinations of evolution forever grind forward.

Never mind that the timeline of most species ends in extinction. But, as a member of the evolutionary jumble collectively known as *Homo sapiens*, the search for a technological or biogenetic “Equalizer” has come up short.

Homo Magus and the Promise of Prolonged Life:

In Lovecraft’s body of fiction, one of the few “equalizers” is prolonged life. For example, the three “wizards” in **The Case of Charles Dexter Ward** – Joseph Curwen, Edward Hutchinson, and Simon Orne – have found an unspecified, perhaps Faustian means to prolong their lives:

“That at least two living men—and one other of whom they dared not think—were in absolute possession of minds or personalities which had functioned as early as 1690 or before was likewise almost unassailably proved even in the face of all known natural laws...They had found unholy ways to keep their brains alive, either in the same body or different bodies...” (2).

With that extended life, if not eternal life, this small group in the next evolutionary step of humankind – *Homo Magus* – search for the long-lost body of knowledge or “equalizer”, that might give the magi equal footing with “The Old Ones”:

“...Could it be possible that here lay the mortal relics of half the titan thinkers of all the ages; snatched by supreme ghouls from crypts where the world thought them safe, and subject to the beck and call of madmen who sought to drain their knowledge for some still wilder end whose ultimate effect would concern, as poor Charles had hinted in his frantic note, ‘all civilisation, all natural law, perhaps even the fate of the solar system and the universe’?” (3).

That Curwen, Hutchinson, and Orne represented a higher evolutionary step is reflected in how they treated the herd of *Homo sapiens*, from which they once emerged. It was noted that (*italics supplied by author*):

“What these horrible creatures—and Charles Ward as well—were doing or trying to do seemed fairly clear from their letters and from every bit of light both old and new which had filtered in upon the case. They were robbing the tombs of all the ages, including those of the world’s wisest and greatest men, in the hope of recovering from the bygone ashes some vestige of the consciousness and lore which had once animated and informed them.

A hideous traffick was going on among these nightmare ghouls, whereby illustrious bones *were bartered with the calm calculativeness of schoolboys swapping books*; and from what was extorted from this centuried dust there was anticipated a power and a wisdom beyond anything which the cosmos had ever seen concentrated in one man or group” (4).

In one sense, prolonged life is a type of time travel. You travel into the future, with little to none of the effects of aging.

In Search of a Living *Necronomicon*?

So why seek such a knowledge, if Curwen possessed a copy of the *Necronomicon* in his library?

They were seeking a living *Necronomicon*, one that possessed all the knowledge that could only be partially inferred by reading between the lines of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred's Tome. No longer would they have to guess at what a text meant; they could ask the author.

As in the late Paul Harvey's, *The Rest of the Story*, banal renditions of history seldom mine all the vein of rich truths behind the written text. Also, where is the exactness of what a person is trying to convey in the normal communication process? According to modern communication theories, words comprise only 7% of the message a person tries to convey. A full 55% of the communicate is encoded in the sender's body language – facial expressions, body posture, gestures, eye movement, physical touch and the use of space. Still another 38% of a person's message is encrypted in verbal gestures – the tone of a person's voice, modulation, pauses, etc.

One could say that the written word misses 93% of the facts that an actual eyewitness to an event or experience could convey. So, as in any good research paper, why depend on the secondary opinions of others, if you could interview the primary source?

If a bygone mage employed a cipher, as did Wizard Whateley, to protect his cabalistic secrets from the prying eyes of a rival or interloper, direct examination of the author would bypass all the mummery used to cloak their dearest trade secrets.

In one sense, if Curwen sought the wisdom of the ages today, where would he turn to ferret out the pages of his living *Necronomicon*? The salts of bygone blasphemers were often imperfect. There was no FDA to ensure that the labeling on gravestones accurately details its contents. As Simon Orne reminded Curwen:

“...Stones are all chang'd now in Nine groundes out of 10. You are never sure till you question...” (5).

Would Curwen use DNA and the science of genetics of today rather than the essential salts and necromancy of yesterday? Present DNA research does not allow questioning the shade, to discover its hidden secrets. The consciousness that composes the entirety of a person's life lies outside conventional genetics.

However, if one of Curwen's original objectives was to find a necromantic means to prolonged or eternal life, are not modern-day Curwens searching for a similar path to extended life in the endless library found in DNA strands? Perhaps, after Curwen's bygone mind became acclimated to the science and facts of today, he would undertake a two-fold approach to his creating a living *Necronomicon*, one from long-dead wizards and their essential salts, and the other, from DNA researches into the secrets of life.

The nature of a necromantic interrogation was not a doctor's consultation among friendly peers. It would be as if a modern Information Technologies practitioner employed all the forensic methods at his or her disposal to exact information possible off a disk drive that had been erased or destroyed during a fire. That person, as did the necromancers, used any means or tools at their disposal to extract information, so they could reconstruct a cyber-crime scene.

Or in the case of Curwen and his cohorts, should the shade of a bygone magus prove unwilling to share its deepest, darkest secrets, the Saxon wizards had recourse to the ancient art of torture, to extract the diabolical truths.

Once a “truth” was fully extracted, the ring of Saxon magi would have to test its veracity.

Were some of the extracted “facts” actual disguised traps, wherein the tortured shade could unleash its vengeance on Curwen and his cohorts? Was Curwen tipped off to a potential wealth of wizardry truths, focused in the occupant of Phaleron jug number 118, by such a tormented reanimate bent on retaliation? Did the Curwen circle’s brash sense of their own superiority spell their downfall and doom?

Phaleron Jug Number 118:

Some fancy that the denizen of Phaleron 118 was none other than Merlin the Great, based on its instructions on how to destroy Curwen:



“The letters were indeed no fantastic invention, the normal script of a very dark period. They were the pointed Saxon minuscules of the eighth or ninth century A.D., and brought with them memories of an uncouth time when under a fresh Christian veneer ancient faiths and ancient rites stirred stealthily, and the pale moon of Britain looked sometimes on strange deeds in the Roman ruins of Caerleon and Hexham, and by the towers along Hadrian’s crumbling wall” (6).

And listen to Marinus Bicknell Willett, the hero of Lovecraft’s longest tale, recites his brief impression of Phaleron No. 118’s reanimated occupant, upon waking from the destruction of Curwen’s extensive Dungeons by that entity (*italics supplied by author*):

“Did not he himself see the noisome aperture in the bungalow cellar? Did not Willett send him home overcome and ill at eleven o’clock that portentous morning? Did he not telephone the doctor in vain that evening, and again the next day, and had he not driven to the bungalow itself on that following noon, finding his friend unconscious but unharmed on one of the beds upstairs?

Willett had been breathing stertorously, and opened his eyes slowly when Mr. Ward gave him some brandy fetched from the car. Then he shuddered and screamed, crying out, ‘*That beard...those eyes...God, who are you?*’ A very strange thing to say to a trim, blue-eyed, clean-shaven gentleman whom he had known from the latter’s boyhood” (7).

If so, then Merlinus Ambrosius (or Welsh: Myrddin Emrys) – best known through the *Historia Regum Britanniae* (circa 1136 AD, by Geoffrey of Monmouth) – still treads the Earth, after the episodes retold in *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* (8). The superior knowledge of wanton wizardry – the living *Necronomicon* – sought by Curwen, Hutchinson, and Orne, this Myrddin Emrys already possessed or even surpassed.

Where did the Consciousness of the Bygone Shades Dwell?

Where did Myrddin’s consciousness reside or, for that matter, the consciousness elements of the long-dead wise men and wizards exist apart from their essential salts?

Obviously, the occupant of Phaleron Jug Number 118 did not awake from a dreamless sleep. As Dr. Willett intoned the final phrase in the ascending node of the “Dragon’s Head,” Myrddin sprung to life with a plan of destruction already in mind, to exterminate Curwen’s Circle of Necromancers.

So where did the consciousness of a shade dwell? Beyond the grave? In the fabled “Outer Spheres?” In his 1927 novel, Lovecraft remains moot on that point.

However, in what some consider HPL’s Magnus Opus – *The Shadow Out of Time* – Lovecraft reasoned out a logical place where the memories of long-dead humans or other sentient entities might dwell, outside the shell or dusty remains of their own bodies.

A supernatural resting place – even for the purpose of his fiction – was out of the question for the materialistic Lovecraft.

His fascination with the idea of displaced personalities caused him to watch the early film, *Berkeley Square* (1933) at least four times. The film portrayed a young American, whose fascination with his family’s past somehow leads his mind to possess the body of an 18th Century ancestor. The film offered little explanation of what became of the 20th Century man’s body, while he lived in the body of his past ancestor, nor what happened to the 18th Century man’s consciousness during that displacement. The ever-logical Lovecraft had already worked out the rudimentary idea of mind-exchange over time before he saw the film, mentioned in a March 1932 letter to Clark Ashton Smith – nicknamed “Klarkash-Ton” by HPL (9).

On a simultaneous timeline, two personalities, one past, the other present existed at the same time. In the macro of an Einsteinium Universe, where Quantum Physics governed the micro events – no spiritual hereafter was needed for *The Shadow Out of Time* to work.

Perhaps Great Myrddin, along with the other great wise men – and those wise entities that were therein inhuman – dwelt alive in the past, while they were dead in the future. Curwen and his cohorts simply brought the conscious parts of those great thinkers forward in time. The fact that Myrddin came alive with a formulated plan for the destruction of Curwen’s Circle not only supports an existing and aware consciousness apart from the grave. The fact also presupposes Great Myrddin’s ability to peer into the future, as the Great Race did, and to formulate the obliteration of Orne and Company.

Or maybe the mind of Myrddin was displaced by a member of the Great Race, and the entity that arose from Phaleron Jug Number 118, possessed a mind of the Yith, who strove with Curwen and his ilk to preserve the timeline, where the hardy coleopterous species of the Earth's latter days continued to ascend the evolutionary food chain after man. Otherwise, where would the keenest minds of the Great Race migrate to when the peril in the prehistoric past asserted itself?

And where did the reanimates from the ashes come from? It could be that the Ascending Node of the Dragon's Tail – courtesy of Lord Yog-Sothoth – brought forward from deep time or deep space, the bodily form of one of the many facets of a shade's incarnations, as shown in *Through the Gate of the Silver Key*. Indeed, the reason some interrogations occurred with shades, where the essential salts appeared incomplete, was because Curwen called forth a scion of that personality from deep space versus from the Earth's dim past.

Or could it be that Curwen chanced on a refined formula first used by the Elder Things to assemble our earliest ancestors from the available molecules in the Earth's primordial ooze? Possibly that is why what Curwen raised up sometimes resembled a Shoggoth – hence the illusion that the salts were imperfect – more than it did a man. Consider the gelatinous *Thing on the Doorstep*, that represented the earthly remains of Edward Pickman Derby and Asenath Waite Derby, after Ephraim Waite was finished with them. We also know some wizards – the unnamed Evil Clergyman and the aforementioned Ephraim Waite – had the ability to recreate a personality – most often his own – in the body of another – over vast distances and times.

It might be that Curwen simply reversed that process, calling forth the personality of another, while invoking the formula of the Elder Things, with the ultimate recombining residing in the reanimates the dark Wizard interrogated.

Terrestrial Magics and Extra-Terrestrial Machinations:

Now, let us return to our original premise – human beings who seek a means to gain equal footing with the Old Ones.

As mighty as Myrddin was, he was still a terrestrial-born entity, schooled in this Earth's darkest secrets. Eternal or not, was he on equal footing with the least of the Old Ones? He who fought the wily magics of Queen Mab, Morgan Le Fay, and Arthur's bastard son, Mordred – what if Myrddin faced Lord Cthulhu?

Consider the sources of an earthly wizard's knowledge, such as the dreaded *Necronomicon*? At best, such books – as the product of fallible human beings, perhaps touched with the delusions of madness and megalomania – contain truth, wrapped in large doses of myth, superstition, the limitations of humanity's five senses, and the non-scientific worldview of primitives.

How much did Abdul Alhazred miss because his senses could not see, how much did he misinterpret, because he did not understand the micro or macro-implications of the cabalistic machinations he observed? How much did the Old Ones or their lesser minions – like stray Cthuloids or Deep Ones – feign or falsify to mislead primitive ilk like Curwen from the real substance of their alien technologies? And what if the aboriginal outlook of human beings, bound by the cultural understanding of his or her era, lacks any frame of reference to accurately interpret the magic?

And what of the unintended results of the use of a particular cabalistic device of the Old Ones by a human being, with our limited perspectives? So much unforeseen destruction is released – the virtual devil in the details – when human beings tinker with normal chemical, physics, or biogenic processes. When wizards test the cabalistic hypotheses they deduce from the *Necronomicon*, are they not children playing with fire at least, or children playing with dynamite in the worse-case scenario? As Lovecraft stated:

“Life is a hideous thing, and from the background behind what we know of it peer daemoniacal hints of truth which make it sometimes a thousandfold more hideous. Science, already oppressive with its shocking revelations, will perhaps be the ultimate exterminator of our human species—if separate species we be—for its reserve of unguessed horrors could never be borne by mortal brains if loosed upon the world” (10).

One of Lovecraft’s recurring themes reasserts itself: the wizard/scientist is undone by his or her thirst for more-than-human wisdom.

Insects among the Old Ones?

Now, consider the domicile or focal point of so many Lovecraftian entities – the Earth – and how they reflect on the stature in the cosmos of those aliens. Why was Yog-Sothoth so concerned about the Earth? Why was Cthulhu consigned to imprisonment under the seas of this tiny watery world? What was it about the Earth that made it the focal point of so much alien interest and struggle between the varied tribes of the Old Ones? Does that mean that the Earth was important, in some way unforeseen by human philosophers? Earth exists in the backwash of millions of stars that form the Milky Way Galaxy, which stands as one speck among untold numbers of other galaxies that populate the limitless universe. Does the Earth hold some vast unknown, pivotal importance to the greater denizens of the cosmos?

Or are the Old Ones – the players in the Lovecraftian revealed pantheon of ancient god-like aliens – actually themselves insects to even greater entities that swarm, fill, and dominate the greater cosmos? That is similar to the argument used by Lovecraft to intellectually dismiss the existence of any of humanity’s long line of deities, thought to care intimately in the matters of humanity:

“...I have seen nothing which could...give me the notion that cosmic force is the manifestation of a mind...like my own infinitely magnified; a potent and purposeful consciousness which deals individually and directly with the: miserable denizens of a wretched little fly speck on the back door of a microscopic universe, and which singles this putrid excrescence out as the one spot whereto to send an only-begotten Son, whose mission is to redeem those accursed fly speck-inhabiting lice which we call human beings—bah!!...” (11).

When science illuminates the darkness in Lovecraft’s works, instead finding a comforting, confused, or crazy god, there is only emptiness and aliens.

Also, against the backdrop of Cosmicism, why would the Old Ones be interested in terminating the investigations of an insect-like Joseph Curwen? Let us assume that the avenger in Phaleron Jug 118 acted as an agent of those in the outer spheres – between the spaces we know, where the Old Ones walk serene and primal, undimensioned and to us unseen. How could such inquiries, made by the lowest of the low on the cosmic food chain, threaten the Old Ones? Do they feel endangered, because they are not as high in the cosmic hierarchy, as we have been led to believe?

Lovecraft does not have to be consistent in his fiction, as he was in his factual prose. After all, cosmicism grew as a philosophical basis for his stories, as his fiction matured. Using the Earth as a cosmic focus for the Old Ones' interest gives his readers a point of reference they could understand.

But, if we are to be consistent, then many of Lovecraft's horrid hall-of-fame monsters and cosmic entities – in their focus on the backwater planet known as the Earth – reveal their identities are lesser powers in the universe, not to be numbered among the greater powers and potentates that eternally traverse the channels of the space/time continuum.

Means to Prolong One's Life According to Lovecraft:

Next, I would like to outline thirteen ways in Lovecraftian fiction, whereby a human being might prolong their lives, the first step to equality with the Old Ones. The list is not meant to be exhaustive.

Some Paths to Extended Life in the Cosmos according to Lovecraft:

- 1) Find yourself the hybrid by-product of an extra-species union – *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*.
- 2) Have a weak-willed descendant look up your cursed ashes, gain a working knowledge of Necromancy, and recall you to the earthly sphere – *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*.
- 3) Tread the outer spheres through wizardry – *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*.
- 4) Tread the Earth longer than a normal person through a type of vampirism – *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*.
- 5) Lie in suspended animation like Cthulhu. There is no mystery as to how Cthulhu lives forever, even though he is dead. He is simply an alien in temporary stasis – *The Call of Cthulhu*.
- 6) Become a dispossessed personality from your mortal body through alien technologies to another immortal being – *The Shadow Out of Time*.
- 7) Become a dispossessed personality from your mortal body through mystical means to a younger mortal body – *The Thing on the Doorstep*.
- 8) Become a dispossessed brain through alien surgical techniques, interchangeable into several alien designer bodies – *The Whisper in Darkness*.
- 9) Continue your existence through another facet of your personality that exists elsewhere – *Through the Gate of the Silver Key*.
- 10) Steal a cursed object – *The Hound*.
- 11) Have a mad-scientist do a code blue on your fresh corpse – *Herbert West – Reanimator*.
- 12) Preserve yourself through medical and cryogenic means. – *Cool Air*.
- 13) Travel through time via dimensional portals and to other worlds can give a semblance of immortality and possible access to longevity through alien or future human techniques – *Dreams in the Witch House*.

Will Human Beings soon Live Forever?

Is humanity destined for eternal life in the ‘here and now’ rather than in a once promised hereafter?

There are many scenarios where mankind either eradicates death or extends life into the hundreds of years versus the less than one hundred years we know of today.

Science fiction will soon become science fact.

Our consciousness may get uploaded into android bodies – that will not experience death. Or will our essences be transferred to new, younger bodies bred for that purpose? Or will we live on and on in a body that is continually renewed by replacement parts – a pieced-together paradise, so to speak?

The countless variations of immortality are only limited by the combination of imagination and engineering marvels humanity hopes to devise.

One source noted recently, that immortality was not a matter of time, but a matter of money. Only those who could afford the tricky technologies necessary to live forever will do so. In that version of the future, the differences between the haves and the have-nots, the 1% and the 99% will multiply exponentially. The fictional vision Lovecraft portrayed in the ghost-written tale *The Mound* – synchronizes with the facts of that probable future:

“The K’nyanians had attained immortality and subjugated other races before them, had the technology to biologically modify vanquished races and other life-forms and reanimate the dead for use as slaves, [food, etc.] The underground people also engaged in sadism, depraved practices, ritualistic orgies and unspeakable horrors such as random body modifications and mutilations of other slave species as entertainment, in order to gratify their time-dulled senses” (12).

Would such longevity help, should humanity ever encounter a real cosmic relative of Great Cthulhu? Perhaps, instead of a ‘High-Noon at the OK Corral’ confrontation, the newly immortal humanity would join with Cthulhu:

“The time would be easy to know, for then mankind would have become as the Great Old Ones; free and wild and beyond good and evil, with laws and morals thrown aside and all men shouting and killing and revelling in joy. Then the liberated Old Ones would teach them new ways to shout and kill and revel and enjoy themselves, and all the earth would flame with a holocaust of ecstasy and freedom” (13).

After all, a change in the longevity of our species does not guarantee a change in our core, savage nature. As one writer put it:

“We were born of risen apes, not fallen angels, and the apes were armed killers besides. And so what shall we wonder at? Our murders and massacres and missiles, and our irreconcilable regiments?” (14).

What future awaits mankind, a trail of atrocities or a track of achievements?

To many, the certainty of classic cosmologies – a promised hereafter, life beyond death – has lost its lulling luster. The once soothing opiate that gave purpose to the powerless proletariat has lost its satiating potency.

The new alternative – life without death – may lead to its own set of unexpected problems.

End Notes:

- (1) *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, by H.P. Lovecraft, 1927.
- (2) Ibid.
- (3) Ibid.
- (4) Ibid.
- (5) Ibid.
- (6) Ibid.
- (7) Ibid.
- (8) *Merlin*, Wikipedia.
- (9) “In My Own Handwriting”, *A Dreamer and a Visionary: H.P. Lovecraft in His Time*, S.T. Joshi, 2001, pp. 344-345.
- (10) *Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family*, by H.P. Lovecraft, 1921.
- (11) H.P. Lovecraft’s Letter to Maurice W. Moe, 15 May 1918.
- (12) *The Mound*: (short story), Wikipedia.
- (13) *The Call of Cthulhu*, by H.P. Lovecraft, 1926.
- (14) *African Genesis*, by Robert Ardrey, 1968.



News

By DJ Tyrer

The morning's papers added to the ever-growing pile of Babel proportions that threatened to collapse any minute in a cascade of languages: French, Russian, German, English. I picked up a copy at random and glanced at the front page: bad news as usual. It was always bad news. Always war. I don't know why I bothered having the papers delivered. I wanted to be kept informed, kept abreast of world events, yet I just couldn't bring myself to read them, couldn't bear to immerse myself in the madness of it all. Today, there was a picture of jets screaming down from a dark sky at a column of armour. Other times it would show a Zeppelin raid on some hapless city or a line of ashen-faced refugees staggering along a rutted road in a monochrome landscape of twisted, shattered trees. The pictures changed, just as details and the names of countries did, but the stories were always much the same, a litany of death and destruction.

They say that, if you don't laugh, you have to cry, and that was exactly the dilemma the news always had me caught within: did I weep at man's-inhumanity-to-man, or laugh at the sheer folly of the collective madness embracing the world? I settled for the compromise of a sigh of disgust and tossing the newspaper back onto the teetering pile, leaving it to be read another day.

That paper must have destabilised the pile, for, a second later, the whole thing toppled to the floor in a deluge of newsprint, scattering pages about in a three-limbed pattern. There was something strangely familiar about it, a sort of niggling thought at the back of my mind, a little like an itch that just couldn't be scratched. Unable to place it, I resolved to ignore it; then, I saw the photograph.

The photo that had caught my eye showed a shattered brick wall upon which someone had daubed a strange, sinuous symbol. The caption beneath the image read: *Have you seen it?* I had – there was graffiti like it in the alley behind my house. What did it mean? I read the accompanying article, but it failed to elaborate upon the nature of the symbol, only that it was always drawn with yellow paint or chalk and that it was being found on more and more walls around the world.

Then, I noticed the curled-over corner of a page from the local newspaper with a headline asking: *Have you seen the Yellow Sign?* Beneath it a photo of an almost-identical symbol. Again, the article lacked any real details; apparently, the curious yellow-coloured symbol was proliferating on the walls of the city. Was it a call to revolution? There was that fear – revolutionary creeds were everywhere – yet it was nothing but speculation. The symbol had to mean something, for it seemed to be everywhere, yet none could be discerned.

There was something entrancing about the swirl, almost as if one could, by staring at it long enough, open a gate to another level of consciousness, or maybe another plane. For a moment, it seemed to blur and spin, but I blinked and the photograph settled itself upon the page once more.

I threw the paper to the floor and began to turn away. I stopped in mid-turn as I took in the full scope of the triskelid pattern that the newspapers had formed when they fell: it was the same symbol that had been daubed on so many walls. It couldn't be a coincidence; it was impossible – it had to be a million-to-one chance that the pattern could have been formed, but for it to have formed *that* pattern at this time *and* with the photographs showing pushed it beyond the realm of pure chance; it *had* to have meaning. I just couldn't believe it; what could it mean?

I felt sick as I looked at it.

“It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the Living God,” I heard someone say, then, realised it had been me. I was not sure why those words, some old Biblical passage I dimly recalled from my youth, had sprung unbidden to my lips. Perhaps there was something of the Trinity and the Cross in that symbol – or, their inverse? Perhaps I was going mad in my self-imposed isolation? Perhaps there was no meaning in anything, after all? Perhaps there was only madness and pure random mischance? Perhaps there was no sanity to escape into from this vaudeville of eternal war?

I spat and cursed, and kicked the newspapers askew so they no longer formed that pattern. I hated it – I hated it all!

And feared it... yes, feared it.

The war continued to move closer and the signs in yellow continued to proliferate upon the walls of the city, until it became almost impossible for someone to go along a street without sighting one. If events continued at this rate, we would either be devastated by battle or the entire city would turn yellow. Yes, I was trying to laugh, create a mask against my terror.

The pile of newspapers continued to grow along with my fears and I used them as a barricade of sorts, blocking my lounge windows. An odd man had taken to following me around on my rare excursions and I was scared he might break-in and kill me; the war was making people act in strange and desperate ways. Well, I say he was following me; I kept seeing him around. An odd-looking fellow with a strangely waxy face who just wouldn't leave me alone; he was even in my dreams, leering at me with waxen features that seemed to melt and run until there was nothing left of his face but a blank mask of an unwholesome whiteness staring at me without eyes.

He was preying on my mind and I was staying in even more than before, too scared to go out in case I encountered him. But, that didn't help; he took to peeking in through my windows, watching my every move. Even with windows locked and curtains closed, he somehow contrived to look in upon me. The torment was driving me mad!

Then, one morning, I awoke to the distant serenade of artillery to discover the three-pronged sign drawn in yellow paint upon the lounge wall and my meticulously-piled papers scattered about in an orgy of chaos.

He had been here. He – had – been – here; here, in my home, my very sanctum sanctorum. Nowhere was safe from him, neither in the world of my dreams or in this waking world of madness. The torment was growing too much and I longed to confront him, to banish him from my nightmares. Little did I realise that, shortly, I would have my chance – and that I would have cause to regret it...

It was two days later, the sounds of gunfire had grown closer and the newspapers had ceased to be delivered – the last one that had arrived had been full of apocalyptic imagery and exhortations to stand fast in the face of the enemy, almost as if the writer had been driven mad by the horrors of war. I couldn't even be certain *who* the faceless enemy actually were any more: Russian, German, Mongol, Chinese, Spanish, American, British, Arab... they all blurred into one until I couldn't say for certain whose coming I feared; maybe it no longer mattered; maybe only death was left to fear?

The photographs in the papers were no use in resolving the matter: featureless tanks and soldiers in gas-masks with no faces to be seen and clad in torn-and-dirtied uniforms that were no longer identifiable. Maybe, in our madness, we had taken to fighting one another regardless of nationality or loyalty: brother against brother and father against son? Maybe, even, self against insane self? The only good thing had been the absence of the man with the waxy face – I had not seen him for those couple of days and hoped the approaching storm had driven him away as it had driven so many onto the path of the refugee. I'd scrubbed at the paint of the symbol on the wall, hoping to erase all trace of my tormentor, but it had proven resistant to all my efforts, becoming blurred, but still maddeningly visible.

Then, I saw him, gazing again in at my window, no expression upon his waxen features, peering in between the curtains. With a cry of rage, I lunged for him, yanking open the curtains in my desperation to take hold of him and punish him for what he had done to me. I recoiled in shock as the mask clattered to the floor – a hideous, crudely-painted pasteboard mockery that had no substance behind it. Stumbling backwards, I tripped and fell into the piles of papers, newsprint scattering and tumbling in its turn, falling down upon me, burying me beneath the accumulated weeks of news, trapping me, pinned and unable to move.

I tried screaming, but my voice couldn't rise above the roar of artillery barrage and aerial bombardment; not that there was anyone to call to, not now: almost everyone, save my tormentor and me, had fled the fighting, and the enemy hadn't quite reached this far. Only that mask was there, surveying me with what seemed to be an obscure grin from where it had fallen. And, then, *He* arrived, faceless and horribly pallid. He picked up the mask and placed it upon Himself, giving Himself, once more, the semblance of a man.

He reached down with dripping yellow fingers and traced His sign upon my face, anointing me as one of His own. Then, He left, abandoning me to lie, trapped, screaming myself hoarse to no avail.

And, so, I lay here, using a free hand and a little of that yellow paint to scribble these thoughts down upon the newspapers and doodle strange twisting, tripartite symbols of the sort that proliferate about me. In the distance, I can hear the sounds of soldiers moving house-to-house, tossing in grenades

to clear buildings and shooting anyone they find. I try to call out, but my voice is almost gone and far too weak to contend with the sounds of battle. All I can hope is that they find me – and spare me – and that I do not die by bullet or bomb, pinned beneath all of this awful news. But, whatever happens, I know that I will see *Him* one day soon, for He has marked me and I am His.

It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the Living God – and, now, I know why...

Ends



The Wall

By Ayd Instone

It was still light when he went to bed. He'd avoided caffeine and other stimulants. He'd taken a mug of hot milk and honey. He lay there. Sleep didn't come. He saw the blue sky turn grey, then dark green, then black. Sleep didn't come. Giving up, he went downstairs and out through the back door, into the starless oppressive darkness of neither night nor day, just as before, and walked down the long narrow garden to the wall. The wall was as it had been, ten feet high of ancient, dry, grey stone. In his hand was the spade. At his feet was his ditch. He started to dig again, down over two feet deep now. The gap was big enough to get his arm through. A bit more digging and he'd be able to scramble under the wall. After a further twenty minutes of relentless but sweat-free digging, the channel was large enough to crouch down and attempt to squeeze under the gap. He got into the hole and tried to make himself as compact as he could. But there was no hole to squeeze into, just the duvet covering his kneeling form on the bed.

He decided not to go to work that day. Instead he walked into town and slid into a coffee shop built over an old church crypt. As before, he denied himself coffee, taking hot cocoa instead. No-one had reason to acknowledge him as he wrote in his journal:

If I can only stay asleep in the dream long enough, I know I'll be able to find it. Living this waking life, knowing I can make no progress is infuriating. Tonight I'll get n, I know it. And what then? What if I'm right? I know I'm right. But is the danger real?

The physics of the dream realm continue to be consistent. I can add another set of conditions that I've found to hold true during multiple visits. They are:

- There is an ever present luminosity, just enough to see. It is never pitch black.
- Electrical or mechanical devices do not work, or work only at low power
- Electric light bulbs emit only a faint glow, never enough to see any better by
- I cannot get wet, either by sweat or immersion in water
- Gravity seems not to be an acceleratory force. When things fall, they fall at a constant speed. There is still mass.
- There is no sun in the sky

He walked past the Bodleian library on the way back, toying with the idea of going back in, but deciding he had already found out all he needed. It had taken some doing, bringing up ancient book after ancient book from the stacks, some which had probably not been requested since they had been entombed in the library at least two hundred years ago. He'd had to copy out great sections by hand, in pencil (as is the rule in the library), and take them home. There, he'd type up or scan his notes, and email them out to anonymous translators dotted around the world who were able to produce an English transcript from the Latin, Arabic and Coptic texts as well as the strange hieroglyphs that he knew would be relevant.

Back home that evening, he drew the curtains, lay on the bed, placed a blindfold over his eyes, and waited. He tried counting down from five hundred. He got confused around 238 and ended up counting back up to 340 before realising his mistake. He took off the blindfold in frustration. The room was dark. He flicked the switch on the bedside lamp. It gave off a dull, pale glow, lighting only the table it stood on. He went downstairs too quickly, touching only one stair in five, but corrected his balance and seemed to glide rather than fall safely down.



Outside there was the wall. And the hole. And the foreboding of the previous nights. The gap was wide and deep enough to crouch and shuffle through. He found himself on a stone ledge that seemed to drop down, but not too far. He easily lowered himself down into a roughly hewn stone room. There was a gap opposite, like a small doorway. Beyond it were stone steps, leading down, down, and down. It hadn't occurred to him that he could see in the dark gloom until he wished he could see better. But it wasn't bad. He started down the steps. Down and down they went. Sometimes veering this way or that, sometimes taking a ninety-degree turn, and sometimes going round and down like a spiral staircase. He descended deep into the Earth, only once giving thought to the return climb.

After what seemed like an hour of downward traveling, the winding stone staircase brought him to a large cavernous room, not unlike a cathedral, with huge pillars stretching up to a vaulted arched roof that was too dark to see. He couldn't discern whether the cavern was man-made or something other. There was something about the angles and ugliness of it all that suggested it was other. The smooth floor, made out of something like marble, was covered in dust and stone debris that crunched underfoot. He walked up to the wide pillars; they, too, had the appearance of a marble-like stone. Carved on them were etchings of what appeared to be a distant narrative, of stylised human-like figures with large heads like, but not like, elephants but with horns instead of tusks. Some of them appeared to have wings. The detailed but highly abstract carvings showed warfare, or at least conquest, of these strange creatures over a much smaller four-legged foe. The smaller creatures appeared outclassed, their spears and flints no match for the devilish death-spitting weapons of the all-powerful horned creatures. He found the pictures disturbing, slightly sickening. Even with only images to guess the story, it seemed like history written by the victors with gloating carved into each strike of the sculptor's chisel. The story seemed to end with the remaining lemur-like creatures caged or enslaved, forced to do the victor's will.

Turning away from this silent horror, and looking further into the cavern, the strange ambient light proved just enough to make out alcoves along each side, each containing stone altar-like slabs. Walking up to them, he found them all to be featureless bar one upon which a partially covered figure was lying.

Inspecting the alcove, he could see the figure was made of white stone, bony and dusty, not living, but waiting. In the dim light and with the debris scattered over it, the body, or whatever it was, remained almost unrecognisable, perhaps human. He looked closer. She had a silver ring on her finger. It slipped off the bony finger easily. It had a triangular, horned, mouthless head on it. The ring slipped smoothly onto his finger.

"This might interest you," said Jones. "Some nut thinks he's found some secret of the Knights Templar in his garden."

“Let’s see,” said Professor Travers. “We know the Templars had a base in East Oxford. That’s why the area is called Temple Cowley. There have been various digs over the years, but since it’s all private residential houses, nothing’s ever amounted to much. We did a dig around there about ten years ago, on Oxford Road. What’s this fellow’s interest?”

Jones handed Travers a printout of an email. “He’s talking about Pyle Road. Where’s that?”

“It’s the 4th century name for the Temple Cowley end of Oxford Road,” said Travers.

“What did you find in the dig before?” asked Jones.

“It was student training dig really. A student was living there and suggested it. Her landlady was an attractive young woman, I remember. Always making us tea, until she got fed up with the increasing number of trenches at the bottom of her garden! We found foundations of a wall, possibly fifth century, sheep bones, not much really. We know there was a large pool or lake near that area and, ironically, there’s a swimming pool on the part of the site where we’d really wanted to dig.” He looked at a hand-drawn map on the printout. “Looks like the same place this chap’s talking about. But I think a secret underground temple is a bit far-fetched.”

Travers wasn’t busy that week, so it was no problem to drive to Oxford Road the next day. He’d had no reply from the email address, and had left phone messages to no avail. The address given on the email was the house next door to where he’d been ten years earlier. Ringing the bell brought no-one to the door. He couldn’t get around the side of the house or see anything over the side gate, so he went next door and rang the bell.

The same woman who had been so obliging a decade earlier opened the door. She was still as attractive, thought Travers, as he was invited in.

“You’re not going to want to dig my garden up again, are you?” said Yvonne after handing him a cup of tea.

“No, no, it’s about the chap next door. Robert Sterling. Do you know him?” asked Travers.

“Haven’t really seen him much at all since he moved in,” she said.

Travers noticed she was fiddling with a ring, not a wedding band, on the first finger of her left hand. She handed him a plate of biscuits. He saw the silver ring had a face on it, like a goat or something.

“That ring you have, may I see it?”

Yvonne looked embarrassed.

“Sorry, I should have told you about it before,” she said, showing him, but not taking it off. “I found it just after you’d finished filling in all the holes in the garden.”

Travers looked at the ring. “No need to apologise. It’s on your land, and one ring isn’t really a hoard of treasure. It is interesting, though.” He wished he could ask to take it away, but he felt he couldn’t. He explained about the email from next door.

“Would you like to have a look at his garden? We can see through from the bottom of mine. We’ll be able to see the wall.”

Travers agreed and they walked out and down her long garden. Yvonne then hopped through a gap in the hedge into the neighbour’s garden. Travers followed cautiously and somewhat reluctantly.

“Well, here’s the wall,” she said.

Travers looked at the dry stone wall. There was nothing unusual about it. It ran the width of the garden and through into the neighbouring gardens on both sides.

Robert Sterling woke up, surprised to find himself on his own bed. He checked his finger for the ring. It wasn’t there. He looked out of the window to see two figures down at the bottom of his garden by the wall. Pulling a dressing gown on over his shorts and t-shirt, he ran downstairs and outside to join them.

Travers saw him coming. “I’m terribly sorry for sneaking in like this...”

Sterling, out of breath held out his hands and shook first Travers’ and then Yvonne’s hands with both of his. “I’m Robert Sterling. Good to see you both. Professor Jones?”

“No, James Travers. Your message was passed on to me,” said Travers.

“And Yvonne, hello,” said Sterling to his neighbour, still holding her hand in his. Then he caught sight of the ring on the other hand.

“That ring. Where did you...how did you? I must have been right! The worlds co-exist. It’s real. It’s still here!” He let go of her hands and turned to the wall. “Here. Underneath. But not directly under, obviously. There’s a veil between.”

“What are you on about?” said Travers. “You said in the message you’d found evidence of the Knights Templar beneath your wall, and yet it appears you’ve done no dig here at all? Is this some kind of joke?”

“It’s no joke professor. I’ve been there. I’ve really been there. Amazing, it was. The Knights discovered it and kept it secret.”

“You’ve been there? How?” asked Yvonne.

Sterling, jerky in his hyperactive movements, swung round to face her. “I travelled there through a dream! Don’t you see? That was the only way cross the veil.” He looked into her eyes, “But you knew that didn’t you? You’ve been there!”

“What’s he talking about?” said Travers. “Anyway, thanks for the tea, madam, and...well, I’d better be making a move.” He turned to go.

Sterling grabbed his arm. “Seventy-five thousand years, professor. Did you know that? That’s how long they’ve been waiting.”

“Who?” said Travers.

“Whoever built the temple was pre-human, from before history, before mankind, when there lived races not favoured by God. Evolutionary dead-ends. Races that 'fell', that aimed to rise up against God...” said Sterling excitedly. “The so-called Holy Grail-a myth, a positive spin. The Templars weren’t keepers of esoteric holy secrets to reveal. They were, in fact, guardians of mankind by protecting the world from the release of a primordial demonic power.”

“What are you talking about, man?” said Travers. “Oh, never mind. Thanks again, and goodbye.”

“I’ll show you out,” Yvonne said, and took him back through her garden and through her side gate. Then she returned to Sterling’s garden. He was still there, touching the wall. She walked up to him slowly and whispered in his ear.

“I’ve been waiting for someone else who could see. I’ll meet you here, tonight.” She slipped the strange ring onto his finger.

That night Sterling lay on his bed in the dark, waiting, worrying. He could feel the ring on his finger. Should he take it off? Should he be doing this? It was too late to turn back now. His eyes closed. Then he could feel the cold stone of the slab he was lying on. He opened his eyes to see the dim light of the temple alcove. He climbed down off the slab. He had been lying where previously the white figure had been.

He could feel something waiting for him, something yearning. The feeling seemed to come from a large doorway he hadn’t seen before, at the far end of the arched hall. He walked over and stepped through it and down wide sweeping stone steps to a cavernous, vaulted space, like an even more enormous cathedral, hewn from the rock. At the far end, on a raised area, was a female shadow, over nine feet tall, still, and silent, and yet beckoning him to come forward.

Sterling tried not to walk forwards, but couldn’t stop his feet. The terrible figure floated towards him, arms out ready to embrace him. This was what the Templars were trying to hide! he thought. This is why they’d built the wall! They’d trapped this terrible being in its lair, and Sterling had ruined everything!

There was a voice in his head as the tall shadow wrapped its arms around him. “The connection is made! The veil is torn! We are free!”

Sterling tried to scream. Nothing. He tried to wake up. Nothing. Was it the ring? He wore it both in this dreamscape and also in the waking realm? Could it be that which had completed the circuit? He couldn’t move his arms. His breath was being squeezed out of him by the tall shadow. He could move his fingers, though. He desperately fiddled with the ring.

More shapes, shadows, evil things, appeared from out of the darkness, dropping down from hidden alcoves in the deep dark where they’d been sleeping like giant bats. They were coming quickly, with a flapping of leathery wings, armed with their weapons, ready to re-take the world from the apemen they’d once conquered. The things swarmed past him on both sides and up the steps behind him.

The ring! It was coming loose! It fell the ground. The figure loosened its hold. Sterling moved his arms to where he thought its neck might be and squeezed. The figure loosened its grip further. Sterling squeezed his grip with all his might.

There was a sudden flood of light. He was awake and standing by a bed, though not his own. Lying on the bed was the inert form of a woman. It was Yvonne. She was dead. The ring lay on the floor at his feet.

Months later, Sterling sat up on his bed in his cell. The bolt clunked as the door opened and four men and a young woman entered. Two of them he recognised as the usual guard and one of the prison officers. The other looked like a doctor, and the girl, some trainee, or nurse. A policeman hung around in the doorway.

“I hear you’ve not been sleeping, Mr Sterling,” said the doctor, lifting the Bible from Sterling’s bed and sitting down.

Sterling said nothing.

“It can often be a side effect of the guilt of a crime. Even though you handed yourself in to the police and confessed so willingly, so quickly.”

“That’s right,” said Sterling. “It was a brutal and selfish crime, and I wished to feel the full force of the law.”

“That’s as may be,” said the doctor. “But something else has come to light.”

The policeman stepped into the room. “We found some journals in your garden by the wall,” said the policeman.

Sterling looked confused, then worried. “That’s impossible,” he said under his breath.

“Oh, you tried to burn them, of course. But they didn’t burn, Mr Sterling. And neither did an unusual ring. It all made very interesting reading. We’ll be looking into your case in a bit more detail, starting with a psychiatric examination tomorrow.”

“But first,” said the doctor, “you need to get some sleep. I’m told you haven’t slept since you’ve been here.” Sterling looked over in horror as the nurse prepared a syringe. “This will help you sleep,” said the doctor.

The prison officers held him down as the nurse administered the injection. “There,” she said. “Now you can sleep.”

“I don’t want to sleep!” Sterling shouted. “I must not sleep!”

Sterling tried to get up and shout again, but he couldn’t. As his mind became foggy, he saw the nurse produce a ring from her pocket. It had a curious horned head motif. She slipped it onto his finger...

Ends

I Edit My Life

By Michael Lee Johnson

I edit my life.
Clothesline pins & clips
hang to dry
dirty laundry.
I turn poetic hedonistic
in my early 70's,
reviewing the joys
and the sorrows
of my journey.
I find myself wanting
a new review, a new product,
a new time machine,
a new internet space,
a new planet where
we small, wee creative
creatures can grow.

Wild Hunt

By Aeronwy Dafies

On a night both dark and stormy
The Wild Hunt comes hunting for me
Devil horses, hounds and riders
Fiery eyes and eyes like spiders
Eyes like dark pits that steal your soul
Eyes that glow red like burning coal
Gaze from which I cannot escape
I seem to sense upon my nape
I run and hide without success
Cry to heaven, my sins confess
Pray for escape but comes there none
Till there is no place left to run
Through the night the Hunt pursues me
For my sins none shall excuse me
Until at last I stumble, fall
And hear the huntsman's bugle call
The hounds dashing to where I fell
Seize my soul, drag it off to Hell!

REVIEW by Neil K. Henderson

Glasgow Celtic Twitchers' Society,

a novella by Hugh Bradley

ISBN 978-0-9931143-1-1. 102 pp. €10.00.

Contact: Hugh Bradley, 30 St Fackna's Terrace, Skibbereen, Co. Cork, EIRE.

A psychic odyssey takes the chemically altered Shug and Tam from a housing scheme in Glasgow to Burundi, Africa, where the parrots are talking Glaswegian thanks to the involvement of a drunk Glasgow-educated eco-warrior, to the Isle of Skye where the mobile librarian has an identity crisis in Gaelic, then to Hackney where it all goes dark and Shug meets his absentee father in an underground tunnel at three in the morning. Many drink- and drug-fuelled escapades intervene. At last they reach the cleansing air of County Cork where re-integration and self-fulfilment follow the social alienation and spiritual disintegration of the past. All manner of peculiar, and downright mad, events and seemingly random 'accidents' are finally seen to have been part of a larger pattern going on in the world while our heroes were busy losing battles with their egos. The still drunk, but getting sober, African eco-warrior turns up in time to decipher a message from the Irish dolphins. (It's all in the clicks, man.) Interspecies communication saves us all in the end.

If this sounds a bit dippy-trippy, let me reassure you that the whole is written with panache and earthy humour that grips the reader and draws him into its tragic-absurd world where events move swiftly from one set of colourful circumstances to the next - at times bamboozling, at others moving, even painful, but never dull for a moment. The dry, often surreal, humour is delivered in a distinctive Glasgow voice (glossary at the front) which keeps us firmly grounded in the nitty-gritty, whatever the bold adventurers think is happening. (The weirdest parts are when what they think is happening, actually is.)

For all the anarchic humour, this book will make you think – about identity, about synchronicity, about natural justice and the role of the individual in society, about society itself, about drink and drugs, about loss, about prayer, about the power of square sausage. Above all, it is about hope. The author has a gift for showing us psychic disconnection from the inside, but he doesn't leave us there. He knows where the light is at the end of the tunnel and skilfully leads us to it. Glasgow Celtic Twitchers' Society is upbeat and uplifting, and might even change your life. (Warning: contains bird-watching references.)

Hugh Bradley says in his intro that Glasgow Celtic Twitchers' Society is to be the first book in a trilogy. Let us hope this is no idle threat. Come ahead, big man, and show us yer stuff!

Treat?

By DJ Tyrer

“Well, I’ll be glad when it’s over,” muttered Jen. She’d been looking forward to having the party, but her berk of a boyfriend had gone and put it online and they’d been inundated with far more people than could fit in the tiny flat. She’d hoped for a treat, instead it’d been hell.

“Well, I guess, the joke’s on you,” chuckled Nick, echoing the refrain of the pounding rap that filled the room.

“Sorry?” she said. It was as if he wanted to annoy her.

Her boyfriend chuckled. “I said, the joke’s on you.”

“Idiot,” she muttered. He must’ve popped a pill, she thought. She was going to make him pay once the last of the people had left. At least they *were* leaving. She’d been beginning to think some of them planned on staying.

Jen elbowed her way through the partygoers to the stereo and turned the music off. Some of them cussed her, but she didn’t care. Her head couldn’t take the noise any more and if it encouraged some of them to leave sooner, good.

Outside, there was the bang and crack of fireworks. Not in the sky, though. From their muted echo, it seemed someone was letting them off beneath the block. Jen swore; one of these days, the idiots would start another fire.

“Great party!” somebody called as they staggered out. Jen didn’t recognise him, although the jacket he wore looked like one of Nick’s. If it was, he deserved to have it stolen. Unfortunately, she had a sick feeling in her stomach that she’d find some of her stuff had also gone walkabout. Nick was definitely going to pay.

“C’mon, babe,” Nick said, giving her a squeeze, “enjoy yerself. It’s a party!”

“Nick, I don’t know anybody here – and, it’s *my* bleeding party! You’ve ruined it!”

He gave her a hangdog expression without any sincerity.

“Some of them are outright giving me the creeps,” she went on. It wasn’t the costumes – only a few had bothered, and most of them were lacklustre, cheap plastic masks and silly printed bibs. “Those two over there, in particular.”

Jen shivered as she pointed at the two she meant, a pair in hoodies that were a disgusting sort of greyish beige colour as if they’d once been white but had gone unwashed for ages. They lurked in the crowd, usually in a corner, always seeming to face in her direction: she kept feeling as if they were watching her. Their heads were sullenly downcast, but she thought they were wearing horrible devil masks beneath their hoods from the momentary glimpses she’d had. Every time she saw them, she felt nervous.

“Who?”

“Those two!” She pointed again.

Nick didn’t seem to see them, but a glance at his dilated pupils told her he probably couldn’t see much at all that wasn’t in his mind.

Slowly, the people filtered out of the flat until she and Nick were left alone. She turned the music off and relished the silence.

“Will you lock up?” Jen asked Nick, then saw he was slumped on the sofa, eyes rolled up into his skull, drooling a little. “Well, sod you, then,” she muttered, “I’ll do it meself.”

Somebody had torn away half the cardboard skeleton she’d stuck to the front door. Jen tore the rest down and tossed it to the passage floor, before slamming the door shut and ramming the bolt home.

“I’m gonna go to bed,” she called down the short corridor, neither knowing nor caring whether Nick heard her. She headed for the bathroom.”

In a foul mood, her head still throbbing, Jen cursed the mould she’d never managed to eradicate from the tiles in the corner by the bath. The vile black stain seemed to mock her.

Jen fished out a wipe from the cupboard and did her best to remove the white make-up that caked her face. The smeared result would have to do; she’d wash it off properly in the morning. She grabbed her toothbrush and dragged it in a cursory fashion across her teeth, spat and rinsed.

She looked in the mirror to examine her deathly complexion, started and turned in shock, gave a shriek. She’d just seen the two hoodies standing in the bathroom doorway. Only, they weren’t. There was no-one there.

Nervously, she stuck her head out into the corridor. Nobody. She called out to Nick, but just received a snore in response. Cursing him under her breath, Jen checked the rest of the flat, even threw open the wardrobe and the hall cupboard, just to be sure. No-one.

“Get a grip,” she told herself. Her headache and tiredness and stress had made her imagine she saw them. She needed to sleep. She just hoped it was late enough that the teenage trick-or-treaters were done. Their idea of a treat could be pretty sick and their ‘tricks’ seemed worse every year and she didn’t want to be woken by a firework through the letterbox.

Jen went back into the bathroom and splashed some water on her face.

She shrieked again when she caught sight of the pair in the mirror, behind her in the doorway. She blinked and they were gone.

“Get a grip,” she repeated, splashing more water on her face.

Jen turned and screamed; only this time the thumping noise of the rap boomed out from the lounge to mask the sound. The two hoodies were standing in the bathroom doorway. It was impossible, she knew: they had not been in the flat and the door was bolted. They had to be a hallucination.

She stared at the pair for a moment. They didn’t move and neither did she. She didn’t dare breathe.

Jen blinked and, in that instant, they were standing right before her. She screamed and pushed herself back onto the washbasin, which sagged away from the wall under her weight. The bass of the rap continued to thump, like her heartbeat in her ears.

Slowly, the two hoodies raised their heads to reveal the devil faces they hid beneath their hoods. They weren't masks. Jen knew these were their real faces, too horrific to comprehend. She sagged.

Suddenly, they were on her. Seizing her, they tossed her with casual ease into the bath. Jen's head struck the tiled wall, splashing bright-red blood across the black mould in a strange and intricate pattern. Stunned, both physically and mentally, Jen just lay there in the bath as they tore at her, rending her flesh.

The last thing she saw was her blood saturating their hooded tops so that they stained red, growing almost black with gore. In her mind's eye, she imagined Nick bopping his head to the beat and laughing out the words: "The joke's on you..."

Red. Then, everything grew black.

Ends

*Originally published in **Red & Black** by DJ Tyrer*

[*Download the pdf for free*](#)

Don't Put That Egg On Toast

By Neil K. Henderson.

They dreamed of an egg in a platinum cup
With the yolk of the world for its soul.
We wait for the world to turn sunny side up.
Don't put that egg on toast.

Their goldsmith has wired up an incubus cell
To the eye of the oyster-glass star.
The offspring is turning around in its shell.
Don't put that egg on toast.

The shell makes a cowl for the keep of the king,
Who fishes for platypus under his tree.
He netted a pearl, but the duck doesn't sing.
Don't put that egg on toast.

It's down to the egg that has bled in a spoon -
And it looks like it's getting away.
The hole in the egg cup has let in the moon.
Don't put that egg on toast.

This Cold Realm

By Wayne Russell

Into the awaiting foaming jaws of death,
we dwell tonight, misfits of something
gone before, bodies perished incinerated,
and scattered out at dawn.

Come with me,

she said~

Nothing is worth your while here
in this cold realm of the damned.

they will caress your ravens' wings and
alabaster halo, alas vengeful resting crowns
embedded with dire sapphires and mystic
ocean chanties.

When at midnight you choose to cross that
jagged, Milken, bone bridge.

A gateway opens into the new born labyrinth,
greet the maker and the creator of mild heavens
and earth. a blood rooster crowing, shall lead
the way.

They Didn't Start As Snakes

By Lana Highfill

They were tentacles, absent beak,
brain, and beats of hearts.
With no heads of their own,
they were far less trouble,
less exacting in their position
when I laid my head to rest.
But they were less fearful, too,
less punishment for me to carry
for being born into what I was.

Tentacles are quiet things – no hissing
or slithering, no sloughing of skin,
no tongues tasting the air, no scales
to rub wrongly in my pruning.

Once absent my body, kept in secret
until needed for my power, I ached
with a heart no longer present to cease
being alone with only the company of arms
and legs absent faces. I dreamed of bodies
with heads and tongues and teeth, and so
changed my own myth to what you know now.

I remember, before this eternity in stone,
a moment of reflection, of gazing
at what I'd made myself into,
at what struck the mightiest of men
to crumbling rubble.

In his deceit, Perseus turned me
against myself, used trickery toward
my self-destruction. In my last battle,
I conquered the very thing of which
I was forged, in legends older than you
will find on any shelf.

In my motionless misery, I call
to my tentacles, am met with silenced
suckling, am left with serpents
as my image, engraved in the histories,
engorged with the blood of my curse,
my head reaching, reaching.



