

# Weird Tales



JULY, 1952

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Published bi-monthly by WEIRD TALES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y. Reentered as second-class matter January 26, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions, \$1.50. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession.

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Vol. 44, No. 5

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

D. McILWRAITH, Editor



## Alethia Phrikodes

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

*Omnia risus et omnis pulvis et omnia nihil.*

DEMONIAC clouds, up-piled in chasmy reach  
Of soundless heaven, smothered the brooding night;  
Nor came the wonted whisperings of the swamp,  
Nor voice of autumn wind along the moor,  
Nor muttered noises of the insomnious grove  
Whose black recesses never saw the sun.  
Within that grove a hideous hollow lies,  
Half bare of trees; a pool in centre lurks  
That none dares sound; a tarn of murky face,  
(Though naught can prove its hue, since light of day,  
Affrighted, shuns the forest-shadowed banes.)  
Hard by, a yawning hillside grotto breathes  
From deeps unvisited, a dull, dank air  
That sears the leaves on certain stunted trees  
Which stand about, clawing the spectral gloom  
With evil boughs. To this accursed dell  
Come woodland creatures, seldom to depart:  
Once I beheld, upon a crumbling stone  
Set altar-like before the cave, a thing  
I saw not clearly, yet from glimpsing, fled.  
In this half-dusk I meditate alone  
At many a weary noontide, when without  
A world forgets me in its sun-blest mirth.  
Here howl by night the werewolves, and the souls  
Of those that knew me well in other days.  
Yet on this night the grove spake not to me;  
Nor spake the swamp, nor wind along the moor,  
Nor moaned the wind about the lonely eaves  
Of the bleak, haunted pile wherein I lay.  
I was afraid to sleep, or quench the spark  
Of the low-burning taper by my couch.  
I was afraid when through the vaulted space.



Of the old tower, the clock-ticks died away  
 Into a silence so profound and chill  
 That my teeth chattered—giving yet no sound.  
 Then flickered low the light, and all dissolved  
 Leaving me floating in the hellish grasp  
 Of bodied blackness, from whose beating wings  
 Came ghoulish blasts of charnel-scented mist.  
 Things vague, unseen, unfashioned, and unnamed  
 Jostled each other in the seething void  
 That gaped, chaotic, downward to a sea  
 Of speechless horror, foul with writhing thoughts.  
 All this I felt, and felt the mocking eyes  
 Of the cursed universe upon my soul;  
 Yet naught I saw nor heard, till flashed a beam  
 Of lurid lustre through the rotting heavens,  
 Playing on scenes I laboured not to see.  
 Methought the nameless tarn, alight at last,  
 Reflected shapes, and more revealed within  
 Those shocking depths that ne'er were seen before;  
 Methought from out the cave a demon train;  
 Grinning and smirking, reeled in fiendish rout;  
 Bearing within their reeking paws a load  
 Of carrion viands for an impious feast.  
 Methought the stunted trees with hungry arms  
 Groped greedily for things I dare not name;  
 The while a stifling, wraith-like noisomeness  
 Filled all the dale, and spoke a larger life  
 Of uncorporeal hideousness awake  
 In the half-sentient wholeness of the spot.  
 Now glowed the ground, and tarn, and cave, and trees,  
 And moving forms, and things not spoken of,  
 With such a phosphorescence as men glimpse  
 In the putrescent thickets of the swamp  
 Where logs decaying lie, and rankness reigns.  
 Methought a fire-mist draped with lucent fold  
 The well-remembered features of the grove,  
 Whilst whirling ether bore in eddying streams  
 The hot, unfinished stuff of nascent worlds  
 Hither and thither through infinity  
 Of light and darkness, strangely intermixed;  
 Wherein all eternity had consciousness,  
 Without the accustomed outward shape of life.  
 Of these swift circling currents was my soul,  
 Free from the flesh, a true constituent part;  
 Nor felt I less myself, for want of form.  
 Then cleared the mist, and o'er a star-strown scene  
 Divine and measureless, I gazed in awe.  
 Alone in space, I viewed a feeble fleck  
 Of silvern light, marking the narrow ken  
 Which mortals call the boundless universe.  
 On every side, each as a tiny star,  
 Shone more creations, vaster than our own,  
 And teeming with unnumbered forms of life;  
 Though we as life would recognize it not,

Being bound to earthy thoughts of human moults.  
 As on a moonless night the Milky Way  
 In solid sheen displays its countless orbs  
 To weak terrestrial eyes, each orb a sun;  
 So beamed the prospect on my wondering soul;  
 A spangled universe, rich with twinkling gems,  
 Yet each a mighty universe of suns.  
 But as I gazed, I sensed a spirit voice  
 In speech didactic, though no voice it was,  
 Save as it carried thought. It bade me mark  
 That all the universes in my view  
 Formed but an atom in infinity;  
 Whose reaches pass the ether-laden realms  
 Of heat and light, extending to far fields  
 Where flourish worlds invisible and vague,  
 Filled with strange wisdom and uncanny life,  
 And yet beyond; to myriad spheres of light,  
 To spheres of darkness, to abysmal voids  
 That know the pulses of disordered force.  
 Big with these musings, I surveyed the surge  
 Of boundless being, yet I used not eyes,  
 For spirit leans not on the props of sense.  
 The docent presence swelled my strength of soul;  
 All things I knew, but knew with mind alone.  
 Time's endless vista spread before my thought  
 With its vast pageant of unceasing change  
 And sempiternal strife of force and will;  
 I saw the ages flow in stately stream  
 Past rise and fall of universe and life;  
 I saw the birth of suns and worlds, their death,  
 Their transmutation into limpid flame,  
 Their second birth and second death, their course  
 Perpetual through the aeons' termless flight,  
 Never the same, yet born again to serve  
 The varying purpose of omnipotence.  
 And whilst I watched, I knew each second's space  
 Was greater than the lifetime of our world.  
 Then turned my musings to that speck of dust  
 Whereon my form corporeal took its rise;  
 That speck, born but a second, which must die  
 In one brief second more; that fragile earth;  
 That crude experiment; that cosmic sport  
 Which holds our proud, aspiring race of mites  
 Whom ignorance in empty pomp adorns,  
 And misinstructs in specious dignity;  
 Those mites who, reasoning outworn, vaunt themselves  
 As the chief work of Nature, and enjoy  
 In fatuous fancy the particular care  
 Of all her mystic, super-regnant power.  
 And as I strove to vision the sad sphere  
 Which lurked, lost in ethereal vortices;  
 Methought my soul, tuned to the infinite,  
 Refused to glimpse that poor atomic blight;  
 That misbegotten accident of space;





That globe of insignificance, whereupon  
 (My guide celestial told me) dwells no part  
 Of empyreal virtue, but where breed  
 The coarse corruptions of divine disease;  
 The festering ailments of infinity;  
 The morbid matter by itself called man:  
 Such matter (said my guide) as oft breaks forth  
 On broad Creation's fabric, to annoy  
 For a brief instant, ere assuaging death  
 Heal up the malady its birth provoked.  
 Sickened, I turned my heavy thoughts away.  
 Then spake the eternal guide with mocking mien,  
 Upbraiding me for searching after Truth;  
 Visiting on my mind the searing scorn  
 Of mind superior; laughing at the woe  
 Which rent the vital essence of my soul.  
 Methought he brought remembrance of the time  
 When my fellows to the grove I strayed,  
 In solitude and dusk to meditate  
 On things forbidden, and to pierce the veil  
 Of seeming good and seeming beauteousness  
 That covers o'er the tragedy of Truth,  
 Helping mankind forget his sorry lot,  
 And-raising hope where Truth would crush it down  
 He spake, and he ceased, methought the flames  
 Of fuming Heaven revolved in torments dire;  
 Whirling in maelstroms of rebellious might,  
 Yet ever bound by laws I fathomed not.  
 Cycles and epicycles of such girth  
 That each a cosmos seemed, dazzled my gaze  
 Till all a wild phantasmal glow became.  
 Now burst athwart the fulgent formlessness  
 A rift of purer sheen, a sight supernal,  
 Broader than all the void conceived by man,  
 Yet narrow here. A glimpse of heavens beyond;  
 Of weird creations so remote and great  
 That even my guide assumed a tone of awe.  
 Borne on the wings of stark immensity,  
 A touch of rhythm celestial reached my soul;  
 Thrilling me more with horror than with joy.  
 Again the spirit mocked my human pangs,  
 And deep reviling me for presumptuous thoughts;  
 Yet changing now his mien, he bade me scan  
 The widening rift that clave the walls of space;  
 He bade me search it for the ultimate;  
 He bade me find the Truth I sought so long;  
 He bade me brave the unutterable Thing,  
 The final Truth of moving entity.  
 All this he bade—but my soul,  
 Clinging to live, fled without aim or knowledge,  
 Shrieking in silence through the gibbering deeps.