

SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY

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NEW
STORIES

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BEMA

by WALLACE WEST

(author of "The Time Lockers")

For the benefit of newcomers: a BEM is a bug-eyed monster, such as used to be seen on almost any science fiction cover. BEMA, as Mr. West explains, is the female of the species, of course. But . . . most important of all . . . we now have the inside dope on who BEMS really are!

DR. SMITH stooped to brush snow out of Falla II's shaggy coat and remained in that position to take a last look at the White House roses blooming behind the iron bars of the fence. They had clung to their glory throughout most of December, but this storm would frost them by morning, poor things.

"Don't bite your toes, girl," he said firmly as they continued their evening "constitutional" along Executive Avenue. "I'll clean out the ice when we get home."

Falla obeyed without question, as she had been taught to do in behavior school; but she was limping badly by the time they passed the YMCA and were turning north up 18th Street.

Mr. Smith looked longingly at the all night hamburger stand where he habitually stopped for coffee after his day's work in the White House library. Eddie would have let him bring Falla in and clean her up properly. But Eddie had quit and gone to parts too distant even to think about; George, his replacement, would be stuffy about dogs in restaurants.

He glanced through the steamy plate glass window of the enameled "tower" and stopped so quickly that Falla bumped into him. Square white cap pushed far back on his narrow head, Eddie himself was deep in perusal of a sports page.

"You're back!" shouted Mr. Smith as he slammed inside with more enthusiasm than he had displayed since the election of Teddy Roosevelt.

"Course," said Eddie with a wide and freckled grin as he folded the paper neatly to its front page and placed it on a pile awaiting sale. "Fellow's gotta work and this is my favorite spot. Right in the center of things."

"But I thought..." Mr. Smith stammered. "I mean, three months ago you went off with that girl you called Captain... You said you were going home..."

"Did." Eddie pushed a cup of black coffee toward his friend and put two hamburgers on the grill. "Vacation. Had a helluva time. Boy, how the old place has changed. The sanfunzies are a thousand feet wide, now, and..." He stopped with a great bobbing of his Adam's apple. "Say! Falla's got ice balls between her toes again. Let me fix her up." He was under the counter and at work before Mr. Smith could protest.

Although it must have hurt, the dog submitted to his ministrations without a whimper.

"She behaves a lot better than she did when she got in this fix last winter," said Eddie, as he finished. "That time she tried to bite me."

"I sent her to a behavior school," said Mr. Smith proudly. "Had to. She kept waking the neighbors at ungodly hours with her barking; can't have that in a furnished room."

"Sent her to school!" Eddie sucked in his thin cheeks while his green eyes twinkled. "Which one?"

"It's run by a woman named Simlungi or something equally outrageous. "She looks a lot like you, come to think of it."

"Should," the boy grinned. "She's my kissin' kin... Cousin or something."

"It's a small universe, as you once said," Mr. Smith mumbled around a mouthful of bun, hamburger and catsup. (Falla was feasting daintily on the second cake which Eddie had transferred to a paper plate and placed on the floor. "Say, I sold that story we wrote together.")

"Story?"

"Yes. The one about what became of the dinosaurs. (*) Here's your part of the swag." Mr. Smith fished in a change purse and brought out several carefully folded bills.

"Gee. Thanks. But this is too much. You did all the writing."

"Fifty-fifty, Eddie. We agreed on that... Now, how about us going to work on another one—maybe a yarn dealing with your trip to far places?"

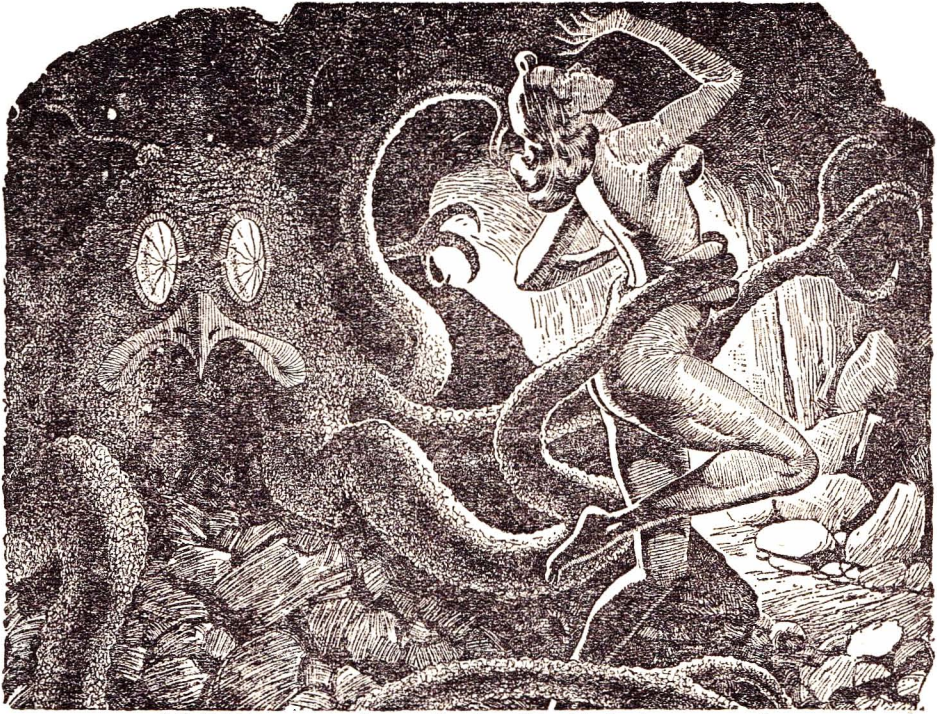
"Nah. Who wants to read about Bugeyed Monsters these days? Let's try a spy story. This Egyptian situation..."

"People who work in the White House don't write spy stories," Mr. Smith said gently. "We'd better stick to science fiction."

"But look! If we wrote a thriller about what caused the Egyptian war scare to peter out, and just before Christmas, too..."

"No, Eddie. I'd rather try a new twist on your BEMS."

(*) "Labor of Love". *Future Science Fiction*, No. 29.



All BEMS aren't the really horrible kind of monsters."

"Old hat," said his friend. "It's coming up 1957, the year of the IGY. I still say...." His eyes went slack. He poured himself half a cup of coffee and drank it scalding. "Mr. Smith, was a story ever written about BEMAS?"

"BEMAS?"

"Yeah. Female BEMS. Did they ever get any publicity?"

AS MR. SMITH was racking his memory back to the days of H. G. Wells, the restaurant door swung open. A policeman entered, beat the snow off his slicker, appropriated a newspaper, and departed with a mere grunt of thanks.

"BEM!" snorted Eddie as he got out a mop and cleaned up the mess.

"Never heard of a single BEMA," said the librarian at last. "Guess authors took it for granted that monsters multiply by parthogenesis."

"Huh!" jeered Eddie. "Their education's been neglected. 'Why, on vacation, I...'" He clapped a hand over his big mouth and looked appre-

hensively at Falla. She licked her hairy chops in a heaven of surfeit, but sat up to beg for another handout.

"It's a BEM's universe, as well as a small one," the counterman began again. "But, like Kipling says, the 'female of the species is more deadly', one way or another, whether she lives on Earth or Arcturus III." He reached for another paper and studied the headlines. "Maybe we could write that spy story about those neglected BEMAS."

"Tell on!" Mr. Smith got out pencil and pad.

"This will be just an outline, sort of. You can fill in the details... Did you ever figure out why all this 'brink of war' stuff hasn't quite jelled into real shooting these last few years?"

"Well," said Mr. Smith judicially, "I've read that since both we and the Russians have developed A and H-bombs we're both stymied. Even trigger-happy generals have too much sense to try imitating the gingham dog and the calico cat, I guess."

"Hah!" cried Eddie. "Gingham dog!

You're getting warm. But what about the little cool wars where they wouldn't use H-bombs? Ever since Korea, people have been making faces across back fences; but nothing really happens? Why?"

"I give up."

"BEMAS!" Eddie almost shouted.

"I don't follow you."

"Look. It's easy. BEMS, being males, just dote on fighting. And it doesn't matter whether or not they have seven horns and ten tails, the way it says in the Bible. I'm a BEM." He bugged his eyes. "Everyone's a BEM to everyone else except maybe to his closest relatives and best friends."

"Down where I came from, in Tennessee, we say that all strangers are 'tacky'," Mr. Smith agreed with a sigh.

"That's right. Leave it to the collective BEMS and the most we'll ever accomplish will be to learn how to swing from the Milky Way by our tails while we throw atomic cocoanuts at each other...I read in my Britannica once that Freud called it 'the death wish'."

"Eddie, you still amaze me," said Mr. Smith; "another hamburger, please."

"But there's a 'life wish', too. And who has most of it?"

"Uh, the BEMAS?" Mr. Smith hazarded. "Females protect the race from extinction?"

"Right the first time. I think you're developing a touch of telepathy."

"**E**VERYBODY'S a bit of a telepath, I've read," said Mr. Smith modestly. "But what's this got to do with gingham dogs and Egyptian politics?"

"More than you'd guess...Do you know when those dog behavior schools we were talking about become all the rage?"

"First one was started shortly after World War II, seems to me."

"O.K. O.K.!" Eddie leaned so far

over the counter that his long nose almost brushed Mr. Smith's. "And who started it?"

"Search me."

"My Cousin, that's who." Eddie slammed the new hamburger on the counter for emphasis.

"So?"

"So a dog is man's best friend, isn't he? So he may do a spot of fighting himself when the spirit moves, but did you ever see a dog egg his master into a scrap? He'll have fits. . . . Grab him by the pants leg. Do anything to keep him out of a mixup, even at the risk of his life. Right?"

"Right." Mr. Smith leaned down to pat Falla's head.

"Only," said Eddie, "a dog can't talk; and he can't write peace propaganda. That's why he barks and howls at the silent moon o' nights. He's frustrated; or rather, he was frustrated until about ten years ago.

"That where my Cousin Simlungi comes in...You should see her, by the way, when she's not in costume. That long bushy tail. That lovely pelt!" He caught himself up short. "What in the name of sin am I talking about? You can't put that kind of stuff in a story."

"You must have been sampling some heady stuff during your trip," Mr. Smith grinned.

"Heady stuff. Yeah. That's it! Just like I said. Cousin got the idea she could teach dogs to exert more influence. (Dog's think *they're* the real people, you see. They're convinced that humans are their pets.) so she started this first school in San Francisco about the time the United Nations was being organized out there.

"Her place got a big writeup in the papers. A lot of American and foreign big shots became interested. Carried the word home with them: No more dogs chasing automobiles, or tearing up the bed, or barking their hearts out at 2 a.m. Instead, pooches that come to heel when you tell 'em, help maiden

ladies across streets, and that sort of thing.

"Behavior schools caught on in a big way after that, all over the world, and Cousin had to call for help to run 'em....She had trouble in the Mohammedan world at first. They didn't care much for dogs, infidel or otherwise. But since the oil royalties have started rolling in, the upper classes are adopting western vices....and dogs....and behavior schools, at a great rate."

"And the BEMAS....?" Mr. Smith prompted.

"Well, nobody noticed that their dogs had been altered a little. And nobody is aware, even today, that, the more thousands of dogs that are trained, the more the war scares seem to dwindle."

REGRETFULLY, Mr. Smith put away his notebook. "I'm afraid this idea's not so hot, Eddie."

"Gee. Why not?" The counterman scratched his flaming crew cut.

"Dog's as good will ambassadors!"

"But dogs always have a lot of influence. Anyone will tell you a boy should own a dog because it builds character. It's a matter of sym.... symby...."

"Symbiosis."

"Yeah. We help them; they help us. And they've been helping humans 'most as long as I have, you can say in the story."

Mr. Smith got out his pad again.

"Speaking of influence," said Eddie, "you once told me we should put the colonial peoples and the nigras back in their places, the way they used to be when you were a boy down South. That correct?"

"Yes." Mr. Smith looked uncomfortable. "I did talk some such nonsense."

"Still think the same way?"

"No!" The librarian was getting red behind the ears now.

"Why not?"

"Oh, come now, Eddie!" Mr. Smith paid his bill with trembling fingers, pushed his bowler down to his ears, and got up to go. "A joke's a joke!"

"Falla?" Eddie said quietly.

The Scottie cocked an ear and a bright eye.

"What did Cousin teach you to keep thinking about, girl?"

Like smoke through damp leaves, words swirled into Mr. Smith's mind: "Peace on earth; good will to men, dogs, *and* BEMS."