

Weird Tales

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Volume 27 CONTENTS FOR JUNE, 1936 Number 6

Cover Design	M. Brundage	
<i>Illustrating a scene in "Loot of the Vampire"</i>		
Loot of the Vampire	Thorp McClusky	642
<i>An eerie, spine-freezing story that will hold your fascinated interest</i>		
Black Canaan	Robert E. Howard	662
<i>A blood-chilling story of the Southern swamps, and a quadroon girl who wielded bitter magic</i>		
The House of the Evil Eye	Hugh Davidson	684
<i>A complete novelette about a strange doom—by the author of "The Vampire-Master"</i>		
The Telephone in the Library	August W. Derleth	710
<i>A mysterious voice whispered over the wires in the midnight hours</i>		
Ballad of the Wolf	Henry Kuttner	719
<i>Versé</i>		
The Grinning Ghoul	Robert Bloch	720
<i>A story of stark horror in the subterranean depths beneath an ill-fated tomb</i>		
The Ruler of Fate (end)	Jack Williamson	728
<i>A romantic novel about a weird being that ruled Earth from a cavern of horror on the Moon</i>		
Mordecai's Pipe	A. V. Milyer	740
<i>A curious story about a pipe of tobacco and a weird catastrophe</i>		
Lethe	Harold G. Shane	742
<i>A bizarre little story about the strange fascination of an old oil painting</i>		
The Harbor of Ghosts	M. J. Bardine	745
<i>A strange weird tale of the sea, and the ghosts of ships that had foundered</i>		
Weird Story Reprint:		
The Brain in the Jar	Norman E. Hammerstrom and R. F. Searight	750
<i>A story of a mad German scientist and weird surgery, first published in WEIRD TALES in 1924</i>		
The Eyrie		760
<i>The readers of this magazine express their opinions</i>		

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

Ballad of the Wolf

By HENRY KUTTNER

The Baron came down to his torture vault, and his steward led the way,
And the steward was smiling an evil smile for the work he had done that day;
For there in the vault the soldier Karl lay bound to the torture rack;
And never again across the snow will the werewolf lead the pack!

The yell of the beast was heard by night, the cry of a lost soul's wo;
Shadows raced through the forest gloom, and blood was red on the snow;
And all men knew at the head of the pack a giant werewolf ran,
For he feared the cross and the green wolfbane, and his eyes were the eyes of a man.

Into the vault to the fettered man came Helga, the Baron's ward,
And the steward chuckled beneath his breath as he leaned on his naked sword;
The jealous rage of a weakling serf is a thing for the strong to fear,
And the steward had sharpened his brooding hate like the point of a poisoned spear.

The Baron looked into Helga's eyes, and he read aright their plea,
And he bade his vassals cut the cords and set the soldier free;
They bent their heads as their master spoke, but they cared not what he said,
For they did not serve the Baron now, but were thralls of an age-old dread.

The Baron fingered his jeweled sword as he stared at the sullen crew;
He looked to left, and he looked to right, and at last the Baron knew
(As all men learn) that he could not break the web that the gray Norns spin . . .
And swiftly he buckled about his waist a girdle of human skin!

There was blood and steel in the torture vault, and the terror of Judgment Day;
The steward fell with a dying shriek and his throat torn half away;
The Baron's ward has slashed the cords and freed her love from the rack;
And never again across the snow will the werewolf lead the pack!