

Fantasy and Science Fiction

NOVEMBER

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Card Sharp

Being a telepathic tape of a "lizard's" thought processes monitored after contact with one of the local peasants. The student will find this significant in view of the subsequent invasion fiasco.

The skarl put his woman's
Reap in the pot to back his bluff
With the ace of demons
Showing and tilted the rock carafe
Forty-five degrees and more
Then wiped his green stubble
With half a hand as if sure
Of everything above the table.

I watched his eyelid's
Shuffle pluck at my four harps,
Stacking the dungsmoke odds
In the greedy warps
Of his discarded mind,
And I almost threw in my hand.
It was too easy, like
Taking venom from a snake.

I could have raised him
But the only thing he had left
Was his woman and damn
Me if I wanted her. I laughed
And called with my platinum
Distorter, the one he had been
eyeing,
And, spitting upon the linoleum,
Turned my hole card. Great
Gruing!

The one-eyed jack of cubes
Transfixed me with a stare
Of utter ruin. After sobs

And small convulsions, my robot
ear
Became aware of words: "O.K.,
Liz,"
The skarl was saying, which is
Not my name of course, "that
Does it," and raked in the pot.

That was three revs ago
And I have come to no conclusions
Except that my wattles are turning
grey
And my brain has lesions,
Or perhaps I need glasses
Or else I should return to the
creche
For my second hatching, or else
hypnosis
Painted that harpshot flush

Upon my eyelids. Still
Who would think a skarl
Could turn the trick, his wet
Eyes blinking in their nest of fat
Like skittish mice, his soft
Features prey to every sculp and
chip
Of emotion. Well, it looks like
thrift
Is the order of the day, at least
until the Drop.

—Walter H. Kerr