

# Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE



Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 325 N. Capitol Ave., Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1913, at the post-office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$4.50 a year in the United States; \$3.00 a year in Canada. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in our possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor. Copyright, 1924, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company

## Contents for December, 1924

Cover Design.....	Andrew Brosnatch	
Death-Waters.....	Frank Belknap Long, Jr.	9
<i>Snakes—and a Black Man in a Black Lake</i>		
The Earth Girl.....	Carroll K. Michener	16
<i>A Distant Planet—Destruction of a Civilization</i>		
With Weapons of Stone.....	C. M. Eddy, Jr.	28
<i>Cavemen—Primitive Love—the Saber-tooth Tiger</i>		
The Death Clinic.....	Otto E. A. Schmidt	34
<i>Weird Revenge of a Great Surgeon</i>		
Cave of Murdered Men.....	W. Benson Dooling	47
<i>A Fantasy</i>		
Kaivalya.....	Mrs. Edgar Saltus	49
<i>Fourth Dimension—Hypnotism—Crime</i>		

(Continued on Next Page)

(Continued from Preceding Page)

<b>A Tryst With Death</b> .....	<b>Edgar White</b>	<b>58</b>
<i>A Rendezvous at the Tomb</i>		
<b>The Valley of Teeheemen (Part One)</b> .....	<b>Arthur Thatcher</b>	<b>61</b>
<i>Two-part Novel—Airplane Falls Into Strange Valley</i>		
<b>Black Temple Band</b> .....	<b>Elwin J. Owens</b>	<b>87</b>
<i>Six Black-robed Men—and a Weird Cave</i>		
<b>His Family</b> .....	<b>C. Franklin Miller</b>	<b>93</b>
<i>A Mad Colonel in the African Wilderness</i>		
<b>A Hand From the Deep</b> .....	<b>Romeo Poole</b>	<b>98</b>
<i>Strange Tale of Quack Surgery</i>		
<b>After</b> .....	<b>Denis Francis Hannigan</b>	<b>106</b>
<i>Beyond the Door of Death</i>		
<b>Creeping Mist</b> .....	<b>Thomas B. Sherman</b>	<b>108</b>
<i>Crime of a Man Who Was Already Dead</i>		
<b>The Silent Five</b> .....	<b>Anthony D. Keogh</b>	<b>116</b>
<i>A Haunted House and a Secret Society</i>		
<b>The Case of the Russian Stevedore</b> .....	<b>Henry W. Whitehill</b>	<b>123</b>
<i>Facts in the Strange Death of Dr. Dinwoodie</i>		
<b>Voodoo</b> .....	<b>Estil Critchie</b>	<b>128</b>
<i>Haiti—Worship of the Green Serpent</i>		
<b>The House of Dust (Conclusion)</b> .....	<b>L. A. Botah</b>	<b>132</b>
<i>Two-part Mystery Serial</i>		
<b>Youth</b> .....	<b>Howard R. Marsh</b>	<b>156</b>
<i>Storiote of Shattered Hopes</i>		
<b>Fairy Gossamer</b> .....	<b>Harry Harrison Kroll</b>	<b>159</b>
<i>A Cave of Hungry Spiders</i>		
<b>The Song Eternal</b> .....	<b>Galen C. Colin</b>	<b>163</b>
<i>Through the Ages It Sang to Him—of Love</i>		
<b>The Crimson Crucifix</b> .....	<b>H. Thompson Rich</b>	<b>170</b>
<i>A Birthmark—an Innocent Kiss—and Disaster</i>		
<b>The Eyrie</b> .....		<b>175</b>
<i>A Chat With the Readers</i>		

---

For Advertising Rates in WEIRD TALES Apply to

**W. B. ZIFF CO.**

Transportation Building  
Chicago

Architects Building  
New York

Bryant Building  
Kansas City

# FAIRY GOSSAMER

by Harry Harrison Kroll



*If you find spider gossamer in the autumn of the year when the spider balls hatch and the young go forth into the world, it's a sign that the fairies are leading you on to good fortune.—OLD FOLKS' SAYING.*

**W**ILLIAM THOMPSON sat at the opening of the sink-hole absorbedly watching tiny strands of spider gossamer issue from the orifice. He had come to this spot in the cavernous limestone region of Kentucky in search of a specimen of the genus *Arimnes*, the most brilliantly colored of temperate zone spiders, his college work in biology at Vanderbilt necessitating his discovering such a specimen. Hearing of a legend current in this neighborhood about spiders, he had come here in the hope of satisfying his requirement.

The story related that years ago one Israel Hicks, suddenly gone crazy and believing himself pursued by an evil spirit, had come out here and begun the breeding of spiders that he might devise a web to entangle the demon that vexed him. It was averred that, previous to his going insane, he had been a wealthy bluegrass farmer; and many believed that he possessed considerable riches. At any rate, the last of his name and kind, he had come here and lived alone, spending his time and energies in catching spiders and shutting them up in a mysterious insectary, which he never permitted any one to visit. And now the old

man had been dead these many long years, and likely was well rid of his evil spirit, and none would probably ever know much more about him and his peculiar hallucination.

"There are spiders somewhere in this locality," William told himself, as he continued to observe the strands of silk wafted up out of the hole. "And if I could investigate down in that sink-hole, I believe I might find just what I am looking for."

He tried getting down into the hole, but apparently it would not readily admit passage of his body.

"Strange about that draft," he continued to meditate. "I never knew one of these glacial blow-outs to have a draft before."

He tested the strength of the air current by casting some leaves into the opening. These fragments rose several feet above the surrounding ground level before the force of the air was sufficiently modified to permit them to drop.

"Well, well," he said thoughtfully; "if I could find the other end of this passage, the chances are that I would find my spider."

He began an examination of sink-holes near by, of which there were many; for in a past geological age a great explosion of natural gas had honeycombed the entire under-surface region, these pits being outlets of the force of the detonation. But

none of the others appeared to have a draft. An ignited match (a certain test of air movement) burnt over them as undisturbed as a candle flame in a closed room. It was apparent to William that there was no direct connection between the pit with a draft and its kindred near by.

"The air has to get in some way, though," he reasoned. "If it comes out, it surely has to go in. One of the holes hereabouts has to have a downward draft."

But no amount of search revealed it. Presently, after an extended exploration, he returned to the chimney hole.

"Israel Hicks," he recalled meditatively out of the traditions of this authority as they had been recounted to him, "used to say that you never see gossamer except in the fall of the year, it being the spinning of the new spider brood. Now, any idiot knows that where there is gossamer there are spiders. I've got to locate the other end of this hole. Likely as not when I do I will have located old man Hicks' spider incubator. I'll wager that it is one gloriously interesting place for the biologist."

The idea fascinated him, for the old lunatic was reputed to have had a fancy collection of spiders. William obtained a long, slender stick, and prodded down into the hole. He found by the experiment that the passageway went deep into the earth, and bent in the direction of the old house, several hundred yards away on a hill, where the old man had made his home. William scratched his head in perplexity. Did the hole come out somewhere near, or under, the house?

He dashed up the hill and into the yard. An eager search of the abandoned enclosure, however, disclosed no such hole as he looked for. He continued his search into the ruinous old house. The floor was gone, and he found an open cellar glaring vacantly back at the patches of sky that showed

through the holes in the clapboards. He stood baffled, for nothing of interest met his eyes. Then suddenly he became aware, across the spot where he stood on the stone cellar bottom, of a draft that chilled his feet. Bending down for a test with his hand, he discerned a steady air movement fanning his feet and entering a crack in the cobbles. By listening he could even hear the sound of it whistling into the hole.

"Aha!" he ejaculated. "The old lunatic had a secret passageway down to his spider hatchery. Let's raise this rock and take a peep inside."

This he did, and there was disclosed, leading deep into the cavernous maw of the earth, a natural tunnel. He had his flashlight with him; and slipping down through the opening, he began the descent. Presently daylight behind him had disappeared. Another turn of the passageway thrust him into Stygian darkness. Down, down he went. Had he not been somewhat familiar with caves, he probably would have lost his nerve and refused to penetrate any farther. Cobwebs hung everywhere—millions of them, lodged here over the long years since old Israel Hicks had first introduced the spinners. There was no question in William's mind that he had found the previously unknown spider hatchery of the crazy old loon. The chances were that he would find the specimen he sought, since Hicks had been a connoisseur in his line of business and likely had overlooked none of the types in the region.

Presently, as he had surmised, he arrived at a widening of the passageway, which in turn opened into a large, cavernous chamber. As he stepped down into the larger room, quite unexpectedly a pivoted rock, not unlike some vast door to a sepulcher, swung to behind him. He paused fearfully, believing that his egress was cut off. But far ahead of him a speck of daylight reassured him—evi-

dently the sink-hole came out into the cavern there, and he could make his escape at the same outlet as the fairy gossamer. He went on, flashing his light on every hand.

WHAT a dreary, haunted den it was! The endless walls of slimy, irregular ceiling were gray with the ashen webs of innumerable spiders. Beads of moisture clung to many of the fastoons, which besprinkled him with chill showers. Literally thousands of the curious, agile creatures, leaping out into view for possible prey at his entrance, as suddenly and uncanonically withdrew to their silken refuges when he turned his light upon them. Their myriad cunning eyes, in that momentary scrutiny, almost frightened him, and caused a cold shudder to run up his spine.

Then with a sudden and involuntary exclamation he stopped. He had found the prize, a beautiful *Arimnes*, possessing perhaps the loveliest geometric markings he had ever observed in the type: almost as large as a silver dollar, with long, graceful legs, and a brilliant figure on its head and another on its back, and intensely black eyes.

His problem, now that he had found it, was to snare it. And no easy problem would it be, as he well knew, for the *Arimnes* is as cunning as it is beautiful, and as fearless and savage as it is cunning. Moreover, William had no desire to risk being bitten by this gentleman. Although the type is regarded as non-poisonous, or but mildly so, nevertheless there were authentic cases where individuals were deadly venomous. He had with him a device manufactured from a fishing reel, section of hat-wire, and gauze, intended to capture insects. With this contrivance he began craftily stalking the prey.

The spider retreated, William following. Then, with cunning sudden-

ness, the creature darted down into a crevice of the rock wall. Out of this retreat William could not budge him. No amount of mild persuasion appeared in the least to affect this crafty gentleman. Finally, at his wits' end, William as a last desperate expedient punched down into the crack with his reel. He desired the specimen alive, but a dead one would be better than none.

It was, as he was to perceive when too late, an ill advised move. Seemingly the hordes of spiders were waiting for just such a signal, for suddenly they were upon him in one great, hungry mob. Great, hairy demons dropped upon his head from above; they crawled across his unprotected face; he felt them ereeping up his trousers legs! Although he frantically brushed them off, slapping them out of his eyes and trying in the darkness to stamp upon them, his efforts seemed only to attract other packs of them.

His mind worked rapidly. Knowing the habits of spiders, and the fact that they may go without food for as long as a year and a half, and in such a state are ravenous, he realized that it would be only a question of time before they would overpower him by their very numbers and devour his body. There in the darkness with no protection and only his flashlight to show the way, it might seem a hopeless task to cope with them. Neither could he beat his way back as he had come, for the pivoted rock cut off his retreat. He could only strive forward, knocking the spiders from his face as he went, and trust to providence to effect his escape by way of the chimneylike suckhole. He therefore began moving forward as best he might, his hat pulled low over his eyes, his coat collar turned up, and his free hand acting as a relentless brush against the stinging, voracious arachnids.

HE SENSED dimly that the nebula of light increased on the opposite side of the chamber as he approached that quarter. In fact, it shortly began to take definite shape. If he could hold out for another span of moments, he would make it. But already he was feeling sensations of pain in all parts of his body, and he was becoming giddy, whether from fear or poison he could not be sure, but his hands and face were swelling from bites. And then he stopped in frozen horror!

Immediately in the opening that would give him egress from this terrible place to the good open sunshine above, he saw the form of the most gigantic spider he had ever beheld! From where he stood, even after making allowance for his unreliable perception, it seemed to measure two feet across! It belonged to a genus about which he had read, but which had never been seen before by the eyes of a white man—the monster golden spider, native of the tropics. Where the light fell upon it from above, it gave back an untarnished reflection of the precious metal from which it derived its name.

Curiously enough, as he beat his way closer in spite of the hazard, he found the smaller pests to be dropping off and falling back. He was in the circle of light, too, and that aided him in brushing them off. Many he succeeded in crushing under his heels.

And well might this smaller fry retire, William vaguely reasoned. For this fat old demon had sufficient capacity to devour them as they came.

He took a fresh, firm grip upon his reel, and approached nearer for the inevitable conflict. He would have to fight here, and to the deadly finish. Either he or the giant spider must fall. Nor did the creature move as he crept nearer and nearer. Its golden eyes never flinched. It still maintained its masterful composure as William, staking his fate upon one ac-

curate cut of the steel fishing rod, prepared to cleave its body in twain with the tubing.

His aim proved true, he saw even before the blow fell. It descended clean and sharp across the middle of the spider's body. And then William, almost collapsing from the letdown of his nerves, saw something he could not bring himself for a moment to believe. Instead of the creature writhing about in the death agony, it scattered, not unlike an apparition, with a sudden metallic clanking and jingling! Until his senses returned to him, and the weakness of his legs gave way to some degree of composure, William was unable to examine the results of this singular metamorphosis. When he did, he found the spider to have been made of golden coins, in an artful similitude of the insect.

When able to think constructively, he conjectured the why of it all. Old man Hicks had had two gods: his money, about which but few knew, and spiders, which he bred and loved. He had placed his money here under the protection of the spiders. The arranging of the coins in form of one of them was a curious slant of the old man's fad. And true to their trust all of these long years, the spiders had all but succeeded in their task.

William got out of the cave as quickly as he could, but not before he had collected the coins in his pockets and the overplus in his hat. Out in the glorious open sunshine he breathed free, finding that none of the bites inflicted upon him would result in more than temporary discomfort.

The adventure recalled to his mind two curious superstitions about spiders: one, that the creatures will not attach their webs to, or come near, gold; and the other that if you find the gossamer in the autumn of the year when the spider balls hatch and the young go forth into the world, it's a sign that the fairies are leading you on to good fortune!