

Weird Tales

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Volume 28	CONTENTS FOR JULY, 1936	No. 1
Cover Design	M. Brundage	
<i>Illustrating a scene in "Red Nails"</i>		
Necromancy in Naat	Clark Ashton Smith	2
<i>A strange and curious tale about the maiden Dalili, and the dead men who dived in the sea</i>		
Hagar	Edgar Daniel Kramer	15
<i>Verse</i>		
Red Nails	Robert E. Howard	16
<i>The tale of a weird roofed city and the strangest people ever spawned</i>		
When the World Slept	Edmond Hamilton	36
<i>A thrilling weird-scientific story about a catastrophe that put the whole world to sleep</i>		
Death	Alfred I. Tooke	48
<i>Verse</i>		
The Unborn	Ronal Kayser	49
<i>A vivid story of a weird pursuit that dogged a man's footsteps with doom inescapable</i>		
Loot of the Vampire (end)	Thorp McClusky	60
<i>An eery novel about a monstrosity that was dead, yet lived a ghastly life in death</i>		
Lost Paradise	C. L. Moore	75
<i>A fascinating tale about Northwest Smith and a weird love on another planet</i>		
Dream Sepulture	C. A. Butz	91
<i>Verse</i>		
The Return of Sarah Purcell	August W. Derleth	92
<i>Even in death she could not be happy without the doll she had loved in life</i>		
Kharu Knows All	Renier Wyers	97
<i>A brief tale of the retribution that struck the ghoul who preyed on a woman's love for her dead husband</i>		
The Kelpie	Manley Wade Wellman	101
<i>What was the hideous thing that rose up out of the little aquarium?—a short tale of horror</i>		
The Snakeskin Cigar-Case	Bodo Wildberg	105
<i>An unusual story about a dread experience in the tropics</i>		
Weird Story Reprint:		
The Ring of Thoth	A. Conan Doyle	109
<i>An eldritch tale of an Egyptian mummy, by a noted British author</i>		
The Eyrie		123
<i>Our readers exchange opinions about the magazine</i>		

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

Necromancy in Naat

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

*A strange, spine-chilling story about the dead people that swam
in the ocean and served the sorcerers of Naat; and
of the living-dead maiden Dalili*

Dead longing, sundered evermore from pain:
How dim and sweet the shadow-hearted love,
The happiness that perished lovers prove
In Naat, far beyond the sable main.

—*Song of the Galley-Slaves.*

YADAR, prince of a nomad people in the half-desert region known as Zyra, had followed throughout many kingdoms a clue that was often more elusive than broken gossamer. For thirteen moons he had sought Dalili, his betrothed, whom the slave-traders of Sha-Karag, swift and cunning as desert falcons, had reft from the tribal encampment with nine other maidens while Yadar and his men were hunting the black gazelles of Zyra. Fierce was the grief of Yadar, and fiercer still his wrath, when he came back at eve to the ravaged tents. He had sworn then a great oath to find Dalili, whether in slave-mart or brothel or harem, whether dead or living, whether tomorrow or after the lapse of gray years.

Disguised as a rug-merchant, with four of his men in like attire, and guided only by the gossip of bazars, he had gone from capital to capital of the continent Zothique. One by one his followers had died of strange fevers or the hardships of the route. After much random wandering and pursuit of vain rumors, he had come alone to Oroth, a western seaport of the land of Xylac.

There he heard a rumor that might concern Dalili; for the people of Oroth were still gossiping about the departure

of a rich galley bearing a lovely outland girl, answering to her description, who had been bought by the emperor of Xylac and sent to the ruler of the far southern kingdom of Yoros as a gift concluding a treaty between these realms.

Yadar, now hopeful of finding his beloved, took passage on a ship that was about to sail for Yoros. The ship was a small merchant galley, laden with grain and wine, that was wont to coast up and down, hugging closely the winding western shores of Zothique and venturing never beyond eyesight of land. On a clear blue summer day it departed from Oroth with all auguries for a safe and tranquil voyage. But on the third morn after leaving port, a tremendous wind blew suddenly from the low-lying shore they were then skirting; and with it, blotting the heavens and sea, there came a blackness as of night thickened with clouds; and the vessel was swept far out, going blindly with the blind tempest.

After two days the wind fell from its ravening fury and was soon no more than a vague whisper; and the skies cleared, leaving a bright azure vault from horizon to horizon. But nowhere was there any land visible, only a waste of waters that still roared and tossed turbulently without wind, pouring ever westward in a tide too swift and strong for the galley to stem. And the galley was borne on irresistibly by that strange current, even as by the hurricane.

"The man stirred not in his chair, but his eyes still widened, slowly, with a horrible glaring."



Yadar, who was the sole passenger, marveled much at this thing; and he was struck by the pale terror on the faces of the captain and crew. And, looking again at the sea, he remarked a singular darkening of its waters, which assumed from moment to moment a hue as of old blood commingled with more and more of blackness: though above it the sun shone untarnished. So he made inquiry of the captain, a graybeard from Yoros, named Agor, who had sailed the ocean for forty summers; and the captain answered:

"This I had apprehended when the

storm bore us westward: for we have fallen into the grip of that terrible ocean-stream which mariners call the Black River. Evermore the stream surges and swiftens toward the place of the sun's outermost setting, till it pours at last from the world's rim. Between us now and that final verge there is no land saving the evil land of Naat, which is called also the Isle of Necromancers. I know not which were the worst fate, to be wrecked on that infamous isle or hurled into space with the waters calling from earth's edge. From either place there is no return for

living men such as we. And from the Isle of Naat none go forth except the ill sorcerers who people it, and the dead who are raised up and controlled by their sorcery. In magical ships that breast the Black River, the sorcerers sail at will to other strands; and beneath their necromancy, to fulfill their wicked errands, the dead men swim without pause for many nights and days whithersoever the masters may send them."

Yadar, who knew little of sorcerers and necromancy, was somewhat incredulous concerning these matters. But he saw that the blackening waters streamed always more wildly and torrentially toward the skyline; and verily there was small hope that the galley could regain its southward course. And he was troubled chiefly by the thought that he should never reach the kingdom of Yoros, where he had dreamt to find Dalili.

All that day the vessel was borne on by the dark seas racing weirdly beneath an airless and immaculate heaven. It followed the orange sunset into a night filled with large, unquivering stars; and at length it was overtaken by the flying amber morn. But still there was no abating of the waters; and neither land nor cloud was discernible in the vastness about the galley.

Yadar held little converse with Agor and the crew, after questioning them as to the reason of the ocean's blackness, which was a thing that no man understood. Despair was upon him; but, standing at the bulwark, he watched the sky and wave with an alertness born of his nomad life. Toward afternoon he descried far off a strange vessel with funereal purple sails, that drove steadily on an eastering course against the mighty current. He called Agor's attention to the vessel; and Agor, with a muttering of sailors' oaths, told him that it was a ship belonging to the necromancers of Naat.

SOON the purple sails were lost to vision; but a little later, Yadar perceived certain objects resembling human heads, that passed in the high-billowing water to the galley's leeward. Deeming that no mortal living men could swim thus, and remembering that which Agor had said concerning the dead swimmers who went forth from Naat, Yadar was aware of such trepidation as a brave man may feel in the presence of things beyond nature. And he did not speak of the matter; and seemingly the head-like objects were not noticed by his companions.

Still the galley drove on, its oarsmen sitting idle at the oars, and the captain standing listless beside the untended helm.

Toward night, as the sun declined above that tumultuous ebon ocean, it seemed that a great bank of thunder-cloud arose from the west, long and low-lying at first, but surging rapidly skyward with mountainous domes. Ever higher it loomed, revealing the menace as of piled cliffs and somber, awful sea-capes; but its form changed not in the fashion of clouds; and Yadar knew it at last for an island bulking far aloft in the long-rayed sunset. From it a shadow was thrown for leagues, darkening still more the sable waters, as if with the fall of untimely night; and in the shadow the foam-crests flashing upon hidden reefs were white as the bared teeth of death. And Yadar needed not the shrill, frightened cries of his companions to tell him that this was the terrible Isle of Naat.

Direly the current swiftened, raging, as it raced onward for battle with the rock-fanged shore; and the voices of the mariners, praying loudly to their gods, were drowned by its clamor. Yadar, standing in the prow, gave only a silent prayer to the dim, fatal deity of his tribe; and his eyes searched the towering isle like those of a sea-flown hawk, seeing the bare hor-

rific crags, and the spaces of dark forest creeping seaward between the crags, and the white mounting of monstrous breakers on a shadowy strand.

Shrouded, and ominous of bale was the island's aspect, and the heart of Yadar sank like a plummet in unsunned seas. As the galley hove nearer to land, he thought that he beheld people moving darkly, visible in the lapsing of surges on a low beach, and then hidden once more by foam and spindrift. Ere he saw them a second time, the galley was hurled with thunderous crashing and grinding on a reef buried beneath the torrent waters. The fore-part of its prow and bottom were broken in, and being lifted from the reef by a second comber, it filled instantly and sank. Of those who had sailed from Oroth, Yadar alone leapt free ere its foundering; but, since he was little skilled as a swimmer, he was drawn under quickly and was like to have drowned in the maelstroms of that evil sea.

His senses left him, and in his brain, like a lost sun returned from yesteryear, he beheld the face of Dalili; and with Dalili, in a bright fantasmagoria, there came the happy days that had been ere his bereavement. The visions passed, and he awoke struggling, with the bitterness of the sea in his mouth, and its loudness in his ears, and its rushing darkness all about him. And, as his senses quickened, he became aware of a form that swam close beside him, and arms that supported him amid the water.

He lifted his head and saw dimly the pale neck and half-averted face of his rescuer, and the long black hair that floated from wave to wave. Touching the body at his side, he knew it for that of a woman. Mazed and wildered though he was by the sea's buffeting, a sense of something familiar stirred within him, and he thought that he had known somewhere, at some former time, a woman

with like hair and similar curving of cheek. And, trying to remember, he touched the woman again, and felt in his fingers a strange coldness from her naked body.

Miraculous was the woman's strength and skill, for she rode easily the dreadful mounting and falling of the surges. Yadar, floating as in a cradle upon her arm, beheld the nearing shore from the billows' summits; and hardly it seemed that any swimmer, however able, could win alive through the wildness of that surf. Dizzily, at the last, they were hurled upward, as if the surf would fling them against the highest crag; but, as if checked by some enchantment, the wave fell with a slow, lazy undulation; and Yadar and his rescuer, released by its ebbing, lay unhurt on a shelfy beach.

Uttering no word, nor turning to look at Yadar, the woman rose to her feet; and, beckoning him to follow, she moved away in the deathly blue dusk that had fallen upon Naat. Yadar, arising and following the woman, heard a strange and eery chanting of voices above the sea's tumult, and saw a fire that burned weirdly, with the colors of driftwood, at some distance before him in the dusk. Straightly, toward the fire and the voices, the woman walked. And Yadar, with eyes grown used to that doubtful twilight, saw that the fire blazed in the mouth of a low-sunken cleft between crags that overloomed the beach; and behind the fire, like tall, evilly posturing shadows, there stood the dark-clad figures of those who chanted.

Now memory returned to him of that which the galley's captain had said regarding the necromancers of Naat and their practises. The very sound of that chanting, albeit in an unknown tongue, seemed to suspend the heartward flowing of his veins, and to set the tomb's chillness in his marrow. And though he was

little learned in such matters, the thought came to him that the words uttered were of sorcerous import and power.

GOING forward, the woman bowed low before the chanters, like a slave. The men, who were three in number, continued their incantation without pausing. Gaunt as starved herons they were, and great of stature, with a common likeness; and their sunk eyes were visible only by red sparks reflected within them from the blaze. And their eyes, as they chanted, seemed to glare afar on the darkling sea and on things hidden by dusk and distance. And Yadar, coming before them, was aware of swift horror and repugnance that made his gorge rise as if he had encountered, in a place given to death, the powerful evil ripeness of corruption.

High leaped the fire, with a writhing of tongues like blue and green serpents coiling amid serpents of yellow. And the light flickered brightly on the face and breasts of that woman who had saved Yadar from the Black River; and he, beholding her closely, knew why she had stirred within him a dim remembrance: for she was none other than his lost love, Dalili!

Forgetting the presence of the dark chanters, he sprang forward to clasp his beloved, crying out her name in an agony of rapture. But she answered him not, and responded to his embrace only with a faint trembling. And Yadar, sorely perplexed and dismayed, was aware of the deathly coldness that crept into his fingers and smote through his very raiment from her flesh. Mortally pale and languid were the lips that he kissed, and it seemed that no breath emerged between them, nor was there any rising and falling of the wan bosom against his. In the wide, beautiful eyes that she turned to him, he found only a drowsy voidness,

and such recognition as a sleeper gives when but half awakened, relapsing quickly into slumber thereafter.

"Art thou indeed Dalili?" he said. And she answered somnolently, in a toneless, indistinct voice: "I am Dalili."

To Yadar, baffled by mystery, forlorn and aching, it was as if she had spoken from a land farther away than all the weary leagues of his search for her. Fearing to understand the change that had come upon her, he said tenderly:

"Surely thou knowest me, for I am thy lover, the Prince Yadar, who has sought thee through half the kingdoms of earth, and has sailed afar for thy sake on the unshored sea."

And she replied like one bemused by some heavy drug, as if echoing his words without true comprehension: "Surely I know thee." And to Yadar there was no comfort in her reply; and his concernment was not allayed by the parrotings with which she answered all his other loving speeches and queries.

He knew not that the three chanters had ceased their incantation; and, verily, he had forgotten their presence. But as he stood holding the girl closely, the men came toward him, and one of them clutched his arm. And the man hailed him by name and addressed him, though somewhat uncouthly, in a language spoken throughout many parts of Zothique, saying: "We bid thee welcome to the Isle of Naat."

Yadar, feeling a dread suspicion, interrogated the man fiercely: "What manner of beings are ye? And why is Dalili here? And what have ye done to her?"

"I am Vacharn, a necromancer," the man replied, "and these others with me are my sons, Vokal and Uldulla, who are also necromancers. We dwell in a house behind the crags, and are attended by the drowned people that our sorcery has called up from the sea. Among our serv-

ants is this girl, Dalili, together with the crew of that ship in which she sailed from Oroth. Like the vessel in which thou camest later, the ship was blown far asea and was taken by the Black River and wrecked finally on the reefs of Naat. My sons and I, chanting that powerful formula which requires no use of circle or pentacle, summoned ashore the drowned company: even as we have now summoned the crew of that other vessel, from which thou alone wert saved alive by the dead swimmer, at our command."

Vacharn ended, and stood peering into the dusk intently; and Yadar heard behind him a noise of slow footsteps coming upward across the shingle from the surf. Turning, he saw emerge from the livid twilight the old captain of that galley in which he had voyaged to Naat; and behind the captain were the sailors and oarsmen. With the paces of sleepwalkers they approached the firelight, the seawater dripping heavily from their raiment and hair, and drooling from their mouths. Some were sorely bruised, and others came stumbling or dragging with limbs broken by the rocks on which the sea had flung them; and on their faces was the look of men who have suffered the doom of drowning.

Stiffly, like automatons, they made obeisance to Vacharn and his sons, acknowledging thus their thralldom to those who had called them from deep death. In their glassily staring eyes there was no recognition of Yadar, no awareness of outward things; and they spoke only in dull, rote-like recognition of certain obscure words addressed to them by the necromancers.

To Yadar, it was as if he too stood and moved like the living dead in a dark, hollow, half-conscious dream. Walking beside Dalili, and followed by those others, he was led by the enchanters through a dim ravine that wound secretly

toward the uplands of Naat. In his heart there was small joy at the finding of Dalili; and his love was companioned with a sick despair.

Vacharn lit the way with a brand of driftwood plucked from the fire. Anon a bloated moon rose red as with sanies-mingled blood, over the wild, racing sea; and before its orb had cleared to a death-like paleness, they emerged from the gorge on a stony fell where stood the house of the three necromancers.

The house was built of dark granite, with long low wings that crouched amid the foliage of close-grown cypresses. Behind it a cliff beetled; and above the cliff were somber slopes and ridges piled in the moonlight, rising afar toward the mountainous center of Naat.

It seemed that the mansion was a place pre-empted by death: for no lights burned in its portals and windows; and a silence came from it to meet the stillness of the wan heavens. But, when the sorcerers neared the threshold, a word was spoken by Vacharn, echoing distantly in the inner halls; and as if in answer, lamps glowed suddenly everywhere, filling the house with their monstrous yellow eyes; and people appeared instantly within the portals like bowing shadows. But the faces of these beings were blanched by the tomb's pallor, and some were mottled with green decay, or marked by the tortuous gnawing of maggots. . . .

IN A great hall of the house, Yadar was bidden to seat himself at a table where Vacharn and Vokal and Uldulla commonly sat alone during their meals. The table stood on a dais of gigantic flagstones; and below, in the main hall, the dead were gathered about other tables, numbering nearly two score; and among them sat the girl Dalili, looked never toward Yadar. He would have joined her, unwilling to be parted from her side: but a deep

languor was upon him, as if an unspoken spell had enthralled his limbs and he could no longer move of his own volition.

Dully he sat with his grim, taciturn hosts who, dwelling always with the silent dead, had assumed no little part of their manner. And he saw more clearly than before the common likeness of the three: for all, it seemed, were as brothers of one birth rather than parent and sons; and all were like ageless things, being neither old nor young in the fashion of ordinary men. And more and more was he aware of that weird evil which emanated from the three, powerful and abhorrent as an exhalation of hidden death.

In the thralldom that weighed upon him, he scarcely marveled at the serving of that strange supper: though meats were brought in by no palpable agency, and wines poured out as if by the air itself; and the passing of the bearers to and fro was betrayed only by a rustle of doubtful footsteps, and a light chillness that came and went.

Mutely, with stiff gestures and movements, the dead began to eat at their tables. But the necromancers refrained from the victuals before them, in an attitude of waiting; and Vacharn said to the nomad: "There are others who will sup with us tonight." And Yadar then perceived that a vacant chair had been set beside the chair of Vacharn.

Anon, from an inner doorway, there entered with hasty strides a man of great thews and stature, naked, and brown almost to blackness. Savage of aspect was the man, and his eyes were dilated as with rage or terror, and his thick purple lips were flecked with foam. And behind him, lifting in menace their heavy, rusted simitars, there came two of the dead seamen, like guards who attend a prisoner.

"This man is a cannibal," said Vacharn. "Our servants have captured him in the forest beyond the mountains, which is

peopled by such savages." He added: "Only the strong and courageous are summoned living to this mansion. . . . Not idly, O Prince Yadar, wert thou chosen for such honor. Observe closely all that follows."

The savage had paused within the threshold, as if fearing the hall's occupants more than the weapons of his guards. One of the liches slashed his left shoulder with the rusty blade, and blood rilled from a deep wound as the cannibal came forward beneath that prompting. Convulsively he trembled, like a frightened animal, looking wildly to either side for an avenue of escape; and only after a second prompting did he mount the dais and approach the necromancers' table. But, after certain hollow-sounding words had been uttered by Vacharn, the man seated himself, still trembling, in the chair beside the master, opposite to Yadar. And behind him, with high-raised weapons, there stationed themselves the ghastly guards, whose features were those of men a fortnight dead.

"There is still another guest," said Vacharn. "He will come later; and we need not wait for him."

Without further ceremony he began to eat, and Yadar, though with little appetite, followed suit. Hardly did the prince perceive the savor of those viands with which his plate was piled; nor could he have sworn whether the vintages he drank were sour or dulcet. His thoughts were divided between Dalili and the strangeness and horror about him.

As he ate and drank, his senses were sharpened weirdly, and he grew aware of eldritch shadows moving between the lamps, and heard the chill sibilance of whispers that checked his very blood. And there came to him, from the peopled hall, every odor that is exhaled by mortality between the recentness of death and the end of corruption.

Vacharn and his sons addressed themselves to the meal with the unconcern of those long used to such surroundings. But the cannibal, whose fear was still palpable, refused to touch the food before him. Blood, in two heavy rills, ran unceasingly down his bosom from his wounded shoulders, and dripped audibly on the stone flags.

Finally, at the urging of Vacharn, who spoke in the cannibal's own tongue, he was persuaded to drink from a cup of wine. This wine was not the same that had been served to the rest of the company, being of a violet color, dark as the nightshade's blossom, while the other wine was a poppy red. Hardly had the man tasted it when he sank back in his chair with the appearance of one smitten helpless by palsy. The cup, rilling the remnant of its contents, was still clutched in his rigid fingers; there was no movement, no trembling of his limbs; and his eyes were wide open and staring as if consciousness still remained within him.

ADIRE suspicion sprang up in Yadar, and no longer could he eat the food and drink the wine of the necromancers. And he was puzzled by the actions of his hosts who, abstaining likewise, turned in their chairs and peered steadily at a portion of the floor behind Vacharn, between the table and the hall's inner end. Yadar, rising a little in his seat, looked down across the table, and perceived a small hole in one of the flagstones. The hole was such as might be inhabited by a small animal: but Yadar could not surmise the nature of a beast that burrowed in solid granite.

In a loud clear voice, Vacharn spoke the single word, "Esrit," as if calling the name of one that he wished to summon. Not long thereafter, two little sparks of fire appeared in the darkness of the hole, and from it sprang a creature having

somewhat the size and form of a weasel, but even longer and thinner. The creature's fur was a rusted black, and its paws were like tiny hairless hands; and its beaded eyes of flaming yellow seemed to hold the malign wisdom and malevolence of a demon. Swiftly, with writhing movements that gave it the air of a furred serpent, it ran forward beneath the chair occupied by the cannibal, and began to drink greedily the pool of blood that had dripped down on the floor from his wounds.

Then, while horror fastened upon the heart of Yadar, it leapt to the cannibal's knees, and thence to his left shoulder, where the deepest wound had been inflicted. There the thing applied itself to the still bleeding cut, from which it sucked in the fashion of a weasel; and the blood ceased to flow down on the man's body. And the man stirred not in his chair; but his eyes still widened, slowly, with a horrible glaring, till the balls were isled in livid white; and his lips fell slackly apart, showing teeth that were strong and pointed as those of a shark.

The necromancers had resumed their eating, with eyes attentive on the small bloodthirsty monster; and it came to Yadar that this was the other guest expected by Vacharn. Whether the thing was an actual weasel, or a sorcerer's familiar, he did not know: but anger followed upon his horror before the plight of the cannibal; and, drawing a sword he had carried through all his travels, he sprang to his feet and would have tried to kill the monster. But Vacharn described in the air a peculiar sign with his forefinger; and the prince's arm was suspended in mid-stroke, and his fingers became weak as those of a babe, and the sword fell from his hand, ringing loudly on the dais. Thereafter, as if by the unspoken will of Vacharn, he was constrained to seat himself again at the table.

Insatiable, it seemed, was the thirst of the weasel-like creature: for, after many minutes had gone by, it continued to suck the blood of the savage. From moment to moment the man's mighty thews became strangely shrunken, and the bones and taut sinews showed starkly beneath wrinkling folds of skin. His face was like the chapless face of death, his limbs were lean as those of an old mummy: but the thing that battered upon him had increased in size only so much as a stoat increases by sucking the blood of some farmyard fowl.

By this token, Yadar knew that the thing was indeed a demon and was no doubt the familiar of Vacharn. Entranced with terror, he sat regarding it, till the creature dropped from the dry bones and skin of the cannibal, and ran with an evil writhing and slithering to its hole in the flagstone.

WEIRD was the life that now began for Yadar in the house of the necromancers. Upon him there rested always the malign thralldom that had overpowered him during that first supper; and he moved as one who could not wholly awake from some benumbing dream. It seemed that his volition was in some way controlled by those masters of the living dead. But, more than this, he was held by the old enchantment of his love for Dalili: though the love had now turned to a spell of despair.

Something he learned of the necromancers and their mode of existence: though Vacharn spoke seldom except with grim ironies; and the sons of Vacharn were taciturn as the dead. He learned that the weasel-like familiar, whose name was Esrit, had undertaken to serve Vacharn for a given term, receiving in guerdon, at the full of each moon, the blood of a living man chosen for redoubtable strength and valor. And it was clear to

Yadar that, in default of some miracle, or sorcery beyond that of the necromancers, his days of life were limited by the moon's period. For, other than himself and the masters, there was no person in all that mansion who had not already passed through the bitter gates of death. . . .

Lonely was the house, standing far apart from all neighbors. Other necromancers dwelt on the shores of Naat; but betwixt these and the hosts of Yadar there was little intercourse. And beyond the wild mountains that divided the isle, there dwelt only certain tribes of anthropophagi, who warred with each other in the black woods of pine and cypress.

The dead were housed in deep catacomb-like caves behind the mansion, lying all night in stone coffins, and coming forth in daily resurrection to do the tasks ordained by the masters. Some tilled the rocky gardens on a slope sheltered from sea-wind; others tended the sable goats and cattle; and still others were sent out as divers for pearls in the sea that ravened prodigiously, not to be dared by living swimmers, on the bleak atolls and headlands horned with granite. Of such pearls, Vacharn had amassed a mighty store through years exceeding the common span of life. And sometimes, in a ship that sailed contrary to the Black River, he or one of his sons would voyage to Zothique with certain of the dead for crew, and would trade the pearls for such things as their magic was unable to raise up in Naat.

Strange it was to Yadar, to see the companions of his voyage passing to and fro with the other liches, greeting him only in mindless echo of his own salutations. And bitter it was, yet never without a dim sorrowful sweetness, to behold Dalili and speak with her, trying vainly to revive the lost ardent love in a heart that had gone fathom-deep into oblivion and had not returned therefrom. And always,

with a desolate yearning, he seemed to grope toward her across a gulf more terrible than the stemless tide that poured for ever about the Isle of the Necromancers.

Dalili, who had swum from childhood in the sunken lakes of Zyra, was among those enforced to dive for pearls. Often Yadar would accompany her to the shore and await her return from the mad surges; and at whiles he was tempted to fling himself after her and find, if such were possible, the peace of very death. This he would surely have done; but, amid the eery wilderments of his plight, and the gray webs of sorcery woven about him, it seemed that his old strength and resolution were wholly lacking.

ONE day, toward sunset-time, as the month drew to its end, Vokal and Uldulla approached the prince where he stood waiting on a rock-walled beach while Dalili dived far out in the torrent waters. Speaking no word, they beckoned to him with furtive signs; and Yadar, vaguely curious as to their intent, suffered them to lead him from the beach and by perilous paths that wound from crag to crag above the curving sea-shore. Ere the fall of darkness, they came to a small landlocked harbor whose existence had been heretofore unsuspected by the nomad. In that placid bay, beneath the deep umbrage of the isle, there rode a galley with somber purple sails, resembling the ship that Yadar had discerned moving steadily toward Zothique against the full tide of the Black River.

Yadar was much bewildered, nor could he divine why they had brought him to the hidden harbor, nor the import of their gestures as they pointed out the strange vessel. Then, in a hushed and covert whisper, as if fearing to be overheard in that remote place, Vokal said to him:

"If thou wilt aid my brother and me in the execution of a certain plan, thou shalt have the use of yonder galley in quitting Naat. And with thee, if such be thy desire, thou shalt take the girl Dalili, together with certain of the dead mariners for oarsmen. Favored by the powerful gales which our enchantments will evoke for thee, thou shalt sail against the Black River and return to Zothique. . . . But if thou helpst us not, then shall the weasel Esrit suck thy blood, till the last member of thy body has been emptied thereof; and Dalili shall remain as the bond-slave of Vacharn, toiling for his avarice by day in the dark waters . . . and perchance serving his lust by night."

At the promise of Vokal, Yadar felt something of hope and manhood revive within him, and it seemed that the baleful sorcery of Vacharn was lifted from his mind; and an indignation against Vacharn was awakened by Vokal's hintings. And he said quickly: "I will aid thee in thy plan, whatever it may be, if such aid is within my power to give."

Then, with many fearful glances about and behind him, Uldulla took up the furtive whispering:

"It is our thought that Vacharn has lived beyond the allotted term, and has imposed his authority upon us too long. We, his sons, grow old: and we deem it no more than rightful that we should inherit the stored treasures and the magical supremacy of our father ere age has debarred us from their enjoyment. Therefore we seek thy help in the slaying of Vacharn."

It came to Yadar, after brief reflection, that the killing of the necromancer should be held in all ways a righteous deed, and one to which he could lend himself without demeaning his valor or his manhood. So he said without demur: "I will help thee in this thing."

Seeming greatly emboldened by Ya-

dar's consent, Vokal spoke again in his turn, saying: "This thing must be accomplished ere tomorrow's eve, which will bring a full-rounded moon from the Black River upon Naat, and will call the weasel-demon Esrit from his burrow. And tomorrow's forenoon is the only time when we can take Vacharn unaware in his chamber. During those hours, as is his wont, he will peer entranced on a magic mirror that yields visions of the outer sea, and the ships sailing over the sea, and the lands lying beyond. And we must slay him before the mirror, striking swiftly and surely ere he awakens from his trance."

AT THE hour set for the deed, Vokal and Uldulla came to Yadar where he stood awaiting them in the outer hall. Each of the brothers bore in his right hand a long and coldly glittering simitar; and Vokal also carried in his left a like weapon, which he offered to the prince, explaining that these simitars had been tempered to a muttering of lethal runes, and inscribed afterward with unspeakable death-spells. Yadar, preferring his own sword, declined the wizard weapon; and, delaying no more, the three went hastily and with all possible stealth toward Vacharn's chamber.

The house was empty, for the dead had all gone forth to their labors; nor was there any whisper or shadow of those invisible beings, whether sprites of the air or mere phantoms, that waited upon Vacharn and served him in sundry ways. Silently the three came to the portals of the chamber, where entrance was barred only by a black arras wrought with the signs of night in silver, and bordered with a repetition of the five names of the archfiend Thasaidon in scarlet thread. The brothers paused, as if fearing to lift the arras; but Yadar, unhesitating, held it aside and passed into the chamber; and

the twain followed him quickly as if for shame of their poltroonery.

The room was large, high-vaulted, and lit by a dim window looking forth between unpruned cypresses toward the black sea. No flames arose from the myriad lamps to assist that baffled daylight; and shadows brimmed the place like a spectral fluid, through which the vessels of wizardry, the great censers and alembics and braziers, seemed to quiver like animate things. A little past the room's center, his back to the doorway, Vacharn sat on an ebon trivet before the mirror of clairvoyance, which was wrought from electrum in the form of a huge delta, and was held obliquely aloft by a serpentine copper arm. The mirror flamed brightly in the shadow, as if lit by some splendor of unknown source; and the intruders were dazzled by glimpsings of its radiance as they went forward.

It seemed that Vacharn had indeed been overcome by the wonted trance, for he peered rigidly into the mirror, immobile as a seated mummy. The brothers held back, while Yadar, thinking them close behind him, stole toward the necromancer with lifted blade. As he drew nearer, he perceived that Vacharn held a great simitar across his knees; and, deeming that the sorcerer was perhaps forewarned, Yadar ran quickly up behind him and aimed a powerful stroke at his neck. But, even while he aimed, his eyes were blinded by the strange brightness of the mirror, as though a sun had blazed into them from its depth across the shoulder of Vacharn; and the blade swerved and bit slantingly into the collar-bone, so that the necromancer, though sorely wounded, was saved from decapitation.

Now it seemed likely that Vacharn had foreknown the attempt to slay him, and had thought to do battle with his assailers when they came. But, sitting at the mirror in pretended trance, he had no doubt

been overpowered against his will by the weird brilliancy, and had fallen into a mantic slumber.

Fierce and swift as a wounded tiger, he leapt from the trivet, swinging his simitar aloft as he turned upon Yadar. The prince, still blinded, could neither strike again nor avoid the stroke of Vacharn; and the simitar clove deeply into his right shoulder, and he fell mortally wounded and lay with his head upheld a little against the base of the snakish copper arm that supported the mirror.

Lying there, with his life ebbing slowly, he beheld how Vokal sprang forward as with the desperation of one who sees imminent death, and hewed mightily into the neck of Vacharn. The head, almost sundered from the body, toppled and hung by a strip of flesh and skin: yet Vacharn, reeling, did not fall or die at once, as any mortal man should have done: but, still animated by the wizard power within him, he ran about the chamber, striking great blows at the paricides. Blood gushed from his neck like a fountain as he ran; and his head swung to and fro like a monstrous pendulum on his breast. And all his blows went wild because he could no longer see to direct them, and his sons avoided him agilely, hewing into him oftentimes as he went past. And sometimes he stumbled over the fallen Yadar, or struck the mirror of electrum with his sword, making it ring like a deep bell. And sometimes the battle passed beyond sight of the dying prince, toward the window that looked seaward; and he heard strange crashings, as if some of the magic furniture were shattered by the strokes of the warlock; and there were loud breathings from the sons of Vacharn, and the dull sound of blows that went home as they still pursued their father. And anon the fight returned before Yadar, and he watched it with dimming eyes.

Dire beyond telling was that combat, and Vokal and Uldulla panted like spent runners ere the end. But, after a while, the power seemed to fail in Vacharn with the draining of his life-blood. He staggered from side to side as he ran, and his paces halted, and his blows became enfeebled. His raiment hung upon him in blood-soaked rags from the slashings of his sons, and certain of his members were half sundered, and his whole body was hacked and overscored like an executioner's block. At last, with a dexterous blow, Vokal severed the thin strip by which the head still depended; and the head dropped and rolled with many reboundings about the floor.

Then, with a wild tottering, as if still fain to stand erect, the body of Vacharn toppled down and lay thrashing like a great, headless fowl, heaving itself up and dropping back again, incessantly. Never, with all its rearings, did the body quite regain its feet: but the simitar was still held firmly in the right hand, and the corpse laid blindly about it, striking from the floor with sidelong slashes, or slicing down as it rose half-way to a standing posture. And the head still rolled, unresting, about the chamber, and maledictions came from its mouth in a pipy voice no louder than that of a child.

At this, Yadar saw that Vokal and Uldulla drew back, as if somewhat aghast; and they turned toward the door, manifestly intending to quit the room. But before Vokal, going first, had lifted the portal-arras, there slithered beneath its folds the long, black, snakish body of the weasel-familiar, Esrit. And the familiar launched itself in air, reaching at one bound the throat of Vokal; and it clung there with teeth fastened in his flesh, sucking his blood steadily, while he staggered about the room and strove in vain to tear it away with maddened fingers.

Uldulla, it seemed, would have made some attempt to kill the creature, for he cried out, adjuring Vokal to stand firm, and raised his sword as if waiting for a chance to strike at Esrit. But Vokal seemed to hear him not, or was too frenzied to obey his adjuration. And at that instant the head of Vacharn, in its rolling, bounded against Uldulla's feet; and the head, snarling ferociously, caught the hem of his robe with its teeth and hung there as he sprang back in panic fright. And though he sliced wildly at the head with his simitar, the teeth refused to relinquish their hold. So he dropped his garment, and leaving it there with the still pendant head of his father, he fled naked from the room. And even as Uldulla fled, the life departed from Yadar, and he saw and heard no more. . . .

DIMLY, from the depths of oblivion, Yadar beheld the flaring of remote lights, and heard the chanting of a far voice. It seemed that he swam upward from black seas toward the voice and the lights, and he saw as if through a thin, watery film the face of Uldulla standing above him, and the fuming of strange vessels in the chamber of Vacharn. And it seemed that Uldulla said to him: "Arise from death, and be obedient in all things to me the master."

So, in answer to the unholy rites and incantations of necromancy, Yadar arose to such life as was possible for a resurrected lich. And he walked again, with the black gore of his wound in a great clot on his shoulder and breast, and made reply to Uldulla in the fashion of the living dead. Vaguely, and as matters of no import, he remembered something of his death and the circumstances preceding it; and vainly, with filmed eyes, in the wrecked chamber, he looked for the sun-dered head and body of Vacharn, and for Vokal and the weasel-demon.

Then it seemed that Uldulla said to him: "Follow me;" and he went forth with the necromancer into the light of the red, swollen moon that had soared from the black river upon Naat. There, on the fell before the house, was a vast heap of ashes where coals glowed and glared like living eyes. Uldulla stood in contemplation before the heap; and Yadar stood beside him, knowing not that he gazed on the burnt-out pyre of Vacharn and Vokal, which the dead slaves had built and fired at Uldulla's direction.

Then, with shrill, eery wailings, a wind came suddenly from the sea, and lifting all the ashes and sparks in a great, swirling cloud, it swept them upon Yadar and the necromancer. The twain could hardly stand against that wind, and their hair and beards and garments were filled with the leavings of the pyre, and both were blinded thereby. Then the wind went up, sweeping the cloud of ashes over the mansion and into its doorways and windows; and through all its apartments. And for many days thereafter, little swirls of ash rose up under the feet of those who passed along the halls; and though there was a daily plying of besoms by the dead at Uldulla's injunction, it seemed that the place was never again wholly clean of those ashes. . . .

REGARDING Uldulla, there remains little enough to be told: for his lordship over the dead was a brief thing. Abiding always alone, except for those liches who attended him, he became possessed by a weird melancholy that turned quickly toward madness. No longer could he conceive the aims and objects of life; and the languor of death rose up around him like a black, stealthy sea, full of soft murmurs and shadow-like arms that were fain to draw him downward. Soon he came to envy the dead, and to deem their lot desirable above any other,

So, carrying that simitar he had used at the slaying of Vacharn, he went into his father's chamber, which he had not entered since the raising up of Prince Yadar. There, beside the sun-bright mirror of divinations, he disemboweled himself, and fell amid the dust and the cobwebs that had gathered heavily over all. And, since there was no other necromancer to bring him back even to a semblance of life, he lay rotting and undisturbed for ever after.

But in the gardens of Vacharn the dead

people still labored, heedless of Uldulla's passing; and they still kept the goats and cattle, and dived for pearls in the dark, torrent main.

And Yadar, being with Dalili in that state now common to them both, was drawn to her with a ghostly yearning; and he felt a ghostly comfort in her nearness. The quick despair that had racked him aforetime, and the long torments of desire and separation, were as things faded and forgot; and he shared with Dalili a shadowy love and a dim contentment.
