

# Science Fiction QUARTERLY

## TWO NEW COMPLETE NOVELS

### *Science Fiction*

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Out of the heart of Tibet came the summons to an American archaeologist, a call that was to plunge him into fantastic conflict with another world. For the people of the High Lama had stolen a thing valuable beyond price to Mars and the Martians were determined to punish Earth and its inhabitants!

### *Fantasy Fiction*

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The science of this far land was so strange as to border upon witchcraft, even though the man, trapped in an alien body, knew that all that happened was due to natural laws, weird as they may be in this world. And his quest to find a way back to the Earth he could not forget led through the grim fire-tunnels to—Sula, mistress of the starstone!

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Something about that pitiful body on the beach looked familiar. . . .

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*Cover by John B. Mussachia from a scene in "Starstone World"  
By Hannes Bok.*

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# STROKE

by JOHN L. CHAPMAN

IT WAS a corpse, a shapeless mass huddled on the warm Tahitian sand. It lay a few feet off shore, black and shriveled, untouched by swells.

I ran to it, knelt, and took a brief glance. There was little doubt. Several days—perhaps a week it had lain there. I was a doctor and knew death when I saw it.

The body bore no external marks. The cold, discolored face was sunken, unrecognizable. Death, from all appearances, had resulted from drowning.

Rising, I looked both ways along the beach. Back of me was the lazy curve of the shore line, my footprints, and in the distance the village. Before me was a lagoon, beyond it an arching cliff. But to the right, nestled in a thick foliage past the sand was a shack, charred and broken.

I stared at it, trying to assemble my thoughts. A body washed upon the shore, for days lying unnoticed on the dry, sun-beaten sand. And the cabin—it was inhabited, for as I watched the crude wooden door opened and a man emerged. He saw me and stood still, watching.

I looked down at the huddled form again, then turned for the shack. But I saw something in the sand and stopped short. It was a faint, misshapen scrawl, etched on the beach a few inches from the head of the corpse, and it said simply: Don't go.

A message. Whether or not it was complete I couldn't tell. Nor had I any notion of what it might mean. But it was there in the sand, and it said, "don't go."

Perplexed, I moved on up the beach to the shack. I was watched carefully by a tall, thin personage, white, shabbily dressed, and a little hawk-nosed.

He put his hands in his pockets and said: "You're from the village?"

I nodded. "I'm its one and only physician. I was strolling and came upon that corpse. Haven't you noticed it?"

"No. A corpse, eh?"

"You live here?"

He nodded.

"Don't you ever come out?"

"For air—yes." He breathed deeply and glanced at the sky. "May rain tonight." He turned his back and started for the door.

"Look," I said, following him, "there's been a body out there for almost a week and

you haven't paid any attention to it. Doesn't that—"

"Had I known it was a corpse," he said drowsily, "I wouldn't have gone near it. That's something that weakens me."

I STARTED to say something, but the words didn't come out. I was in the cabin doorway, my gaze frozen on a strange mechanism that all but filled the shack's interior. Such an affair as I had never seen before. Actually, it was indescribable, a twisted, perplexing heap of machinery.

"What's that?" I gasped, "an invention?"

The tall fellow turned and faced me. "In a way."

"But—if it isn't an invention—what is it?"

"A machine."

For a moment I was lost in bewilderment. "Who are you?" I asked, "and what is this—this apparatus? What does it do?"

The other rolled a cigarette slowly, and lit it. Then he said: "I'm August Wharton—a scientist, so to speak. This is my work—my life devotion. It's a machine."

"I know—obviously it's a machine. But what's it for?"

He smiled. "I don't know yet. If it does what I think it will, its purpose could be for many things."

I stepped closer, trying to make sense out of the affair. But the thing wasn't to be understood by a doctor. To me, it was like a new language.

"Tahiti," I muttered, "is a funny place for this sort of thing. How long have you been—"

"Seven months. I'm finished now. Only a few experiments remain."

I stood there awhile, completely amazed.

Suddenly I remembered the corpse on the beach, and a few duties to perform. I hurried out, promising to return.

Natives rowed the body upshore to the village. Forbes, an assistant of mine, provided transportation to my quarters, where we awaited the arrival of authorities.

I told Forbes the story, and included Wharton.

"The name is familiar," he mused. "I believe the natives mentioned him not so long ago. Someone discovered the cabin and

made an investigation. There was talk of this—machine.”

“I can’t understand it,” I said. “It’s the strangest affair I’ve ever seen—yet it must have some purpose. Wharton seems to know what he’s doing, but doesn’t care to discuss it. And the dead man—Wharton completely avoided him.”

“Shut-ins get that way,” said Forbes, “especially in Tahiti.”

“Possibly. But I’m not satisfied with things. I’m going back. Care to come along?”

“No. I want to be in on the autopsy.”

“That’s an idea. Keep your eyes open.”

**T**HE SUN had disappeared behind clouds, veiling the shack and the winding shore line in a gray gloom. A swell formed and lapped across the beach, seeping into the damp sand a few feet from where I stood.

I was looking down at the dim outline left by the corpse, and the simple, meaningless “don’t go”. I wondered for a moment about the message—and the machine.

Then I turned and hurried to the cabin and flung the door back. I all but tripped in my amazement.

The shack was bare—the machine was gone and Wharton apparently had gone with it. All that remained was a battered chair, a desk, and a notebook.

Shaking a little, I took the notebook out-side, knelt on the sand and began turning the dusty, half-torn pages. Here, perhaps, was the answer, or a clue.

I came upon a penciled script, and read at random:

“April 9. Framework completed. Must stop to await arrival of last shipment from Hawaii. Progress normal.” I turned a page.

“May 12. Storm receding. Progress slowed in view of exterior work necessary on cabin.

“May 21. Visitors last night. Natives, perhaps, whose curiosity overcame them. No harm to the apparatus, though future precaution may be of value.”

Another page.

“June 4. Final touches completed. Had another visitor—a white man—first to see the machine. In a few moments I shall experiment, before he returns. He discovered a corpse on the beach, and when he left I investigated.

There was a strange scrawling in the sand which I did not understand. However, it is none of my concern . . .”

Running footsteps interrupted me. I looked up, and Forbes, puffing and wild-eyed, came to a halt.

“The queerest,” he panted, “case we’ve seen. At the autopsy—they took fingerprints—the corpse is Wharton!”

“Wharton! But I saw him in the cabin—at the same time!”

“I know—but the prints don’t lie—the fellow is Wharton!”

“That’s crazy,” I growled. “One man can’t be in two places—” I paused, remembering the script. “Wait. There’s more to this diary.”

We read Wharton’s last entry:

“Everything is in good order. My only danger lies in the rotation of the earth. If my theories are wrong, I may land in the ocean. If not, I will be transported safely seven days into the past . . .”

The same thought came to both of us. A time traveller!

**S**UDDENLY it was clear. Wharton had left for the past, had landed in the ocean, and had swum ashore. The corpse—had it been recognizable—

I sat there in a stupor, unable to move. “That’s it,” I managed at length, “Wharton became the corpse after his time journey. You see, Forbes—the cabin is empty.” I handed him the diary, and he read the last page.

Then he stood there a moment, thinking. “My God!” he exclaimed. “I see it all now. The message in the sand. He was going to warn himself, but he didn’t finish—don’t you see?”

“What are you babbling about?” I demanded.

“Look—the diary says Wharton saw the message before he left. So, when he swam ashore and fell exhausted on the beach, he began writing, but stopped because he remembered seeing the message before. It fits perfectly—”

“What fits? What do you mean?”

“That’s right, I didn’t tell you. Wharton’s death wasn’t caused by drowning or exhaustion. It was caused by the fact that after he had scrawled two words in the sand, he remembered that the message had ended there, and that he was going to become the corpse. The autopsy explains that. He died of heart attack.”

THE END