

**FANTASTIC
UNIVERSE**
SCIENCE FICTION

OCT.
35c

ICD



**SHADOW OF
THE SWORD**

AN EXCITING NEW NOVEL

by **WYNNE WHITEFORD**

SURVIVAL IN SPACE — An Article by **LESTER DEL REY**
CLARK ASHTON SMITH ■ **STANLEY MULLEN** ■ **LEE CHAYTOR**

INTERVIEW WITH A HERO

I saw Medusa.

I was on that flight to Orion XVII a year ago. I see you remember. Yes, that was the flight that turned up at Deseret, days overdue, with one man sitting frozen at the controls—one badly frightened man who had operated mostly by instinct and survived because some of these ships seem to *know* where their home port is. . . . He was frantic when they tried to pry him loose from controls, frantic and blank-eyed when they asked him what had happened to the others on the ship, screaming hysterically about "The eyes! The eyes!"

That was me.

I am really much better now.

Yes, yes, I'll tell you what happened. We had a perfect landing, with Carter at the controls. Once Smith had run a series of tests he announced the air was safe, the three of us decided to go out to explore. Smith stayed behind.

When I think of it now, there was an evil quality to the lushness of the country around us, an evil quality that we did not sense at first, fascinated as we were by the almost tropical richness of the forest we soon found ourselves in. Forest? No, jungle! There were fantastic flowers in the shadows in this jungle, fantastic man-sized flowers that seemed to have a life of their own; Herb Young insisted, a little shakily, that one of these purple lilies, as we called them for want of a better name, had reached out to him and almost caressed him. Carter snorted something about space sickness, and we pushed on. . . .

Be patient! I'm coming to her. . . .

We struggled on for hours. There never seemed to be an end to this infernal cloying green *goo* that seemed to reach out at us—that seemed to grasp at us with its slimy green tentacles—a cloying mass of green that seemed to whisper to you that everything would be fine if you'd only rest a little, rest on the soft green moss under the nearby trees—or what passed for trees, rest and let the lillies around you lean over you and give you a little of the shade you were panting for. . . .

We turned back. We'd told Smith to fire his gun if we weren't back after some hours—or if he had trouble. There was the sound of a shot behind us—half blotted out by the trees and the flowers and the very air around us—and we turned back.

The return was agony. Both of the youngsters collapsed at one point, and I had to shout at them, to rave at them, to curse them into staggering to their feet and plunging on, staggering blindly back down the path we'd hewn hours earlier.

Finally we reached the ship, to find Smith standing in front—no, crouched, really—his frightened, sightless eyes staring into space. He was all stone.

The two boys rushed ahead of me as we neared the ship—and were bending over him when SHE laughed. . . .

They say I have been mad, and perhaps they are right, but I swear to you that I saw HER sitting there on a rock, clad in some blue thing that resembled the dress my wife had worn the night before we blasted off, the snakes crawling out of that head of her's. . . . She had her hands to her head, in that familiar gesture as old as Time when a woman sees a man, and she was laughing, a tinkling cymbal-like laugh that sent shivers down my back. . . . And there those poor young fools stood, turned into stone.

I seem to remember her beginning to turn as she heard my scream. I ran like all hell was behind me—ran for the shelter of the waiting ship—ran to where I could crouch, shaking and sobbing, over the waiting controls. . . .

Must you go? Will you do me a favor, please? Could you go to see my wife, please? I haven't seen her for so long. . . . The name is Mary Carter. . . .

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

OCTOBER 1958
Vol. 10, No. 4

	Operation Disaster	4
	by <i>Lee Chaytor</i>	
	Let the Dream Die	21
	by <i>Stanley Mullen</i>	
	Survival in Space	38
	by <i>Lester del Rey</i>	
<hr/> H. L. Herbert <i>Publisher</i>	Symposium of the Gorgon	49
	by <i>Clark Ashton Smith</i>	
<hr/> Hans Stefan Santesson <i>Editorial Director</i>	Shadow of the Sword	57
	by <i>Wynne N. Whiteford</i>	
	Search for Life	93
	by <i>Clyde Hostetter</i>	
	Lap of the Primitive	95
	by <i>William F. Nolan</i>	
	Shapes in the Sky	105
	by <i>Civilian Saucer Intelligence</i>	
	Universe in Books	114
	by <i>Hans Stefan Santesson</i>	
Virgil Finlay <i>Cover Design</i>	Flying Saucer of the Seas	120
	by <i>Stephen Bond</i>	
	Companion	122
	by <i>John Ashton</i>	

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, Vol. 10, No. 4. Published monthly by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC., 320 Fifth Ave., N. Y. 1, N. Y. Subscription 12 issues \$3.75, single copies 35¢. Foreign postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter at the post office, New York, N. Y. The characters in this magazine are entirely fictitious and have no relation to any persons living or dead. Copyright, 1958, by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC. All rights reserved. Oct., 1958.

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

symposium

of the gorgon

by . . . *Clark Ashton Smith*

It was a dangerous thing to be there in the palace of Medusa—as she died—and equally dangerous later . . .

At the third cup I penetrate the Great Way; A full gallon—Nature and I are one.

—*Li Po*

I DO not remember where or with whom the evening had begun. Nor can I recall what vintages, brews and distillations I had mingled by the way. In those nights of an alcoholically flaming youth I was likely to start anywhere, drink anything and end up anywhere else than at the port of embarkation.

It was therefore with interest but with little surprise that I found myself among the guests at the symposium in the Gorgon's hall. Do not ask me how I got there: I am still vague about it myself. It would be useless to tell you even if I could, unless you are one of the rare few elected for similar adventures. And if you are one of these, the telling would be needless.

Liquor brings oblivion to most; but to certain others, enfranchisement from time and space, the awareness of *Tao*, of all that is or has ever been or will ever be. By liquor I mean of course the true essence poured from the *Dive*

Clark Ashton Smith, poet and short story writer, author of THE STAR TREADER AND OTHER POEMS (published in 1912), GENUS LOCI, OUT OF SPACE AND TIME, and LOST WORLDS, is perhaps best known as the creator of a mythos second only to Lovecraft's—the world of the Book of Eibon.

Bouteille. But, on occasion, any bottle can be divine.

Just why, at that particular time, after what must have been a round of mundane barrooms, I should have entered the mythologic palace of Medusa, is a matter hardly apparent but determined, no doubt, by the arcanic and inflexible logic of alcohol. The night had been foggy, not to say wet; and on such nights one is prone to stray into the unlikeliest places. It was not the first time I had gotten a little mixed up in regard to the Einsteinian continuum.

Having read Bullfinch and other mythologists, I had small difficulty in orienting myself to the situation. At the moment of my entrance into the spacious early Grecian hall, I was stopped by a slave-girl attired only in three garlands of roses arranged to display and enhance her charms. This girl presented me with a brightly polished silver mirror the rim and handle of which were twined appropriately with graven serpents. She also gave me a capacious wine-cup of unglazed clay. In a low voice, in the purest Greek of pre-Euripidean drama, she told me the mirror's purpose. The cup I could fill as often as I pleased, or was able, at a fountain of yellow wine in the foreground, rilling from the open mouth of a marble sea-nymph that rose from amidst its bubbling ripples.

Thus forewarned, I kept my eyes on the mirror, which reflected the room before me with admirable clearness. I saw that my fellow-

guests—at least any who possessed hands—had also been considerably equipped with mirrors, in which they could look with safety at their hostess whenever politeness required.

Medusa sat in a high-armed chair at the hall's center, weeping constant tears that could not dim the terrible brightness of her eyes. Her tonsure of curling serpents writhed and lifted incessantly. On each arm of the chair perched a woman-headed, woman-breasted fowl that I recognized as a harpy. In other chairs, the two sisters of Medusa sat immobile with lowered eyes.

All three were draining frequent cups served with averted eyes by the slave-girls, but showed no sign of intoxication.

There seemed to be a lot of statuary about the place: men, women, dogs, goats, and other animals as well as birds. These, the first slave-girl whispered as she passed me, consisted of the various unwary victims turned to stone by the Gorgon's glance. In a whisper lower still, she added that the fatal visit of Perseus, coming to behead Medusa, was momentarily expected.

I felt that it was high time for a drink, and moved forward to the verge of the vinous pool. A number of ducks and swans, standing unsteadily about it with wine-splashed plumage, dipped their beaks in the fluid and tilted their heads back with obvious relish. They hissed at me viciously as I stepped among them. I slipped on their wet droppings and plunged hastily into the

pool but still retained the cup and the mirror as well as my footing. The fluid was quite shallow. Amid the loud quacking of the startled birds and the giggling of several golden-tressed sirens and russet-haired Nereids who sat on the farther edge, stirring the pool to luminous ripples with their cod-like tails, I stepped forward, splashing ankle-deep, to the marble sea-girl and lifted my cup to the yellow stream that issued from her grinning mouth. The cup filled instantly and slopped over, drenching my shirt-front. I drained it at a gulp. The wine was strong and good, though tasting heavily of resin like other antique vintages.

Before I could raise the cup for a second draft, it seemed that a flash of lightning, together with a violent wind, leapt horizontally across the hall from the open doorway. My face was fanned as if by the passing of a god. Forgetting the danger, I raised my eyes toward Medusa, over whom the lightning hovered and swung back with the movement of a weapon about to strike.

I remember my mythology. It was indeed the sword of Perseus, who wore Mercury's winged shoes and the helmet loaned by Hades which made him invisible. (Why the sword alone should be perceptible to sight, no myth-maker has explained). The sword fell, and the head of Medusa sprang from her seated body and rolled in a spatter of blood across the floor and into the pool where I stood petrified. It was a moment of

pandemonium. The ducks and geese scattered, quacking, honking madly, and the sirens and Nereids fled shrieking. They dropped their mirrors as they went. The head sank with a great splash, then rose to the surface. I caught a sidelong flick of one dreadful agonized eye—the left—as the head rolled over and soared from the water, its snaky locks caught in an unseen armored grip by the pursuing demigod. Then Perseus and his victim were gone, with a last lightning flash of the sword, through the doorway where the nymphs had vanished.

I climbed from the reddening pool, too dazed to wonder why I still retained power of movement after meeting the Gorgon's eye. The slave-girls had disappeared. The trunk of Medusa had fallen forward from its chair, upon which the harpies still perched.

Beside Medusa stood a beautiful winged white horse, dabbled from hoofs to mane with the blood that still ran from the fallen monster's neck. I knew that it must be Pegasus, born of her decapitation according to myth.

Pegasus pranced lightly toward me, neighing in excellent Greek:

"We must go. The decrees of the gods have been fulfilled. I see that you are a stranger from another time and space. I will take you wherever you wish to go, or as near to it as possible."

Pegasus kneeled and I mounted him bareback, since he had been born without saddle or reins.

"Cling tightly to my mane. I will not unhorse you," he promised, "whatever the speed or altitude of our journey."

He trotted out through the doorway, spread his shining wings on an orient dawn, and took off toward the reddening cirrus clouds. I turned my head a little later. An ocean lay behind us, far down, with raging billows turned to mere ripples by distance. The lands of morning gleamed before us.

"To what period of time, and what region?" asked Pegasus above the rhythmic drumming of his wings.

"I came from a country known as America, in the 20th century A.D.," I replied, raising my voice to reach his ears through the thunder.

Pegasus bridled and almost stopped in mid-flight.

"My prophetic insight forbids me to oblige you. I cannot visit the century, and, in particular, the country, that you name. Any poets who are born there must do without me—must hoist themselves to inspiration by their own bootstraps, rather than by the steed of the Muses. If I ventured to land there, I should be impounded at once and my wings clipped. Later they would sell me for horse meat."

"You underrate their commercial acumen," I said. "They'd put you in a side-show and charge a stiff entrance fee. You're well known, in a way. Your name and picture are on sideboards at many gas-stations. A synonym for speed if nothing else."

"Anyway, there is little induce-

ment for me to return. I have been trying to drink myself out of it for years and decades. Why go back, after escaping? Why end up, as I will sooner or later, at the highly expensive mercy of doctors, hospitals and undertakers?"

"You are certainly sensible, will you indicate a place and period more to your liking?"

I mused awhile, reviewing all I could remember of both history and geography.

"Well," I decided at last, "some South Sea island might do, before the discovery by Captain Cook and the coming of the missionaries."

Pegasus began to accelerate his flight. Day and darkness shuttled by, sun, moon and stars were streaks above, and the regions below were blurred by inconceivable speed, so that I could not distinguish fertile from desert, land from water. We must have circled the earth innumerable times, through the birth and death of millenniums.

Gradually the speed of the winged horse decelerated. A cloudless sun became stable overhead. A balmy subtropic sea, full of green islands, rolled softly on all sides to the horizon.

Pegasus made an easy landing on the nearest island, and I slipped dizzily from his back.

"Good luck," he neighed. Then, stretching his wings once more, he soared toward the sun and disappeared with the suddenness of a time-machine.

Feeling that Pegasus had aban-

done me in a rather summary fashion, I peered about at my surroundings. At first sight I had been left in an uninhabited isle, on a coral reef lined with untrodden grass and rimmed with pandanus and breadfruit trees.

Presently the foliage stirred and several natives crept forth. They were elaborately tattooed and armed with wooden clubs studded with sharks' teeth. Judging from their gestures of fear and wonder, they had never seen a white man or a horse of any color, winged or un-winged. They dropped their clubs as they neared me, and pointed questioning fingers, a trifle shaky, at the skies where Pegasus had vanished.

"Think nothing of it," I said in my suavest and most reassuring tones. Remembering a vague religious upbringing, I made the sign of benediction.

The savages grinned shyly, displaying an array of filed teeth only less formidable than the sharks' incisors and molars that decorated their clubs. Plainly they were losing their fear and making me welcome to the island. Their eyes appraised me with inscrutable blandness, like those of innocent children who expect someone to feed them.

I am pencilling this account in a small notebook found in one of my pockets. Three weeks have passed since Pegasus left me among the cannibals. They have treated me well and have fattened me with all the abundance that the isle affords. With

taro and roast pig, with breadfruit, coconuts, guavas, and many unknown delicious vegetables. I feel like a Thanksgiving turkey.

How do I know they are cannibals? By human bones, hair, skin, piled or strewn about as animal remnants are in the neighborhood of slaughter-houses. Apparently they have moved their feasting places only when the bones got too thick. Bones of men, women, children, mixed with those of birds, pigs and small four-footed creatures. An untidy lot, even for anthropophagi.

The island is of small extent, perhaps no more than a mile in width by two in length. I have not learned its name and am uncertain to which of the many far-flung archipelagos it belongs. But I have picked up a few words of the soft, many-vowelled language — mainly the names of foodstuffs.

They have domiciled me in a clean enough hut, which I occupy alone. None of the women, who are comely enough and quite friendly, have offered to share it with me. Perhaps this is for therapeutic reasons—perhaps they fear I might lose weight if I were to indulge in amorous activity. Anyway, I am relieved. All women are cannibalistic, even if they don't literally tear the meat from one's bones. They devour time, money, attention, and give treachery in return. I have long learned to avoid them. Long ago my devotion to drink became single-hearted. Liquor at least has been faithful to me. It requires no eloquence, no

flattery, no blandishments. To me, at least, it makes no false promises.

I wish Pegasus would return and carry me off again. Truly I made a chuckle-headed choice in selecting one of the South Sea isles. I am weaponless; and I don't swim very well. The natives could overtake me quickly if I stole one of their outrigger canoes. I never was much good at boating even in my college days. Barring a miracle, I am destined to line the gizzards of these savages.

The last few days they have allowed me all the palm-wine I can drink. Perhaps they believe it will improve the flavor. I swig it frequently and lie on my back staring at the bright blue skies where only parrots and sea-birds pass. I cannot get drunk and delirious enough to imagine that any of them is the winged horse. And I curse them in five languages, in English, Greek, French, Spanish, Latin, because they cannot be mistaken for Pegasus. Perhaps, if I had plenty of high-proof Scotch and Bourbon, I could walk out of this particular time-plexus into something quite different . . . as I did from modern New York into the ancient palace of Medusa.

Another entry, which I hardly expected to make. I don't know the day, the month, the year, the century. But according to these misguided islanders—and mine—it was pot day. They brought out the pot at mid-morning: a huge vessel of

blackening battered bronze inscribed around the sides with Chinese characters. It must have been left here by some far-strayed or storm-wrecked junk. I don't like to conjecture the fate of the crew, if any survived and came ashore. Being boiled in their own cooking-pot must have been a curious irony.

To get back to my tale. The natives had set out huge quantities of palm-wine in crude earthen vessels, and they and I were getting ginned up as fast as we could. I wanted a share of the funeral feast, even if I was slated to afford the *pièce-de-résistance*.

Presently there was a lot of jabbering and gesticulating. The chief, a big burly ruffian, was giving orders. A number of the natives scattered into the woods, and some returned with vessels full of spring-water which they emptied into the pot, while others piled dry grass and well-seasoned fagots around its base. A fire was started with flint and an old piece of metal which looked like the broken-off end of a Chinese sword-blade. It was probably a relic of the same junk that had provided the pot.

I hoped that the user had broken it only after laying out a long file of cannibals.

In a rather futile effort to raise my spirits, I began to sing the *Marseillaise*, and followed it with *Lulu* and various other bawdies. Presently the water was bubbling, and the cooks turned their attention to me. They seized me, stripped off my rag-

ged clothes, and trussed me up adroitly, knees to chest and arms doubled at the sides, with some sort of tough vegetable fiber. Then, singing what was doubtless a cannibal chantey, they picked me up and heaved me into the pot, where I landed with a splash and settled more or less upright in a sitting position.

At least, I had thought they would knock me on the head beforehand rather than boil me like a live lobster.

In my natural fright and confusion it took me some moments to realize that the water, which had seemed scalding hot, was in reality no warmer to the epidermis than my usual morning tub. In fact it was quite agreeable. Judging by the violence with which it bubbled beneath my chin, it was not likely to grow much hotter.

This anomaly of sensation puzzled me mightily. By all rights I should be suffering agonies. Then, like a flash of lightning, I remembered the passing sidelong flick of Medusa's left eye and the apparent lack of effect at the time. Her glance had in no way petrified me—but in some strange fashion it must have toughened my skin, which was now impervious to the normal effects of heat; and perhaps also to other phenomena. Perhaps, to cause the mythic petrification, it was necessary to sustain the regard of *both* the Gorgon's eyes.

These things are mysteries. Anyway, it was as if I had been given a flexible asbestos hide. But, curiously

enough, my keenness of touch was unimpaired.

Through the veering smoke I saw that the cooks were coming back, laden with baskets of vegetables. They were all getting drunker; and the chief was the drunkest. He lurched about, waving his war-club, while the others emptied their baskets into the kettle. Only then did they perceive that things had not proceeded according to culinary rules. Their eyes grew rounder and they yelled with surprise to see me grinning at them from the steaming ebullient contents. One of the cooks made a pass at my throat with a stone knife—and the knife broke in the middle. Then the chief stepped forward, shouting ferociously, and hoisted his toothed war-club.

I ducked under and to one side. The club descended, making a huge splash—and missed me. Judging from their outcries, some of the cooks must have been scalded by the flying water. The chief fared worse. Over-balanced by that mighty stroke, he lurched against the pot, which careened heavily, spilling much of the contents. Using my weight repeatedly against the side, I managed to overthrow the vessel, and rolled out in a torrent of water, smoke, and vegetables.

The chief, yowling from what must have been third-degree burns, was trying to extricate himself from the brands and embers into which he had fallen. Limping, he got to his feet after several vain attempts and staggered away. The other cooks,

and the expectant feasters, had already decamped. I had the field to myself.

Looking around, I noticed the broken-off sword which had been used in striking fire, and levered myself in its direction. Holding it clumsily, I contrived to work my wrist-fetters against the edge. The blade was still fairly sharp and I soon had my hands free. After that it was no trick to untruss my legs.

The wine had worn off but there were many unemptied pots of it still around. I collected two or three, and put some of the spilled vegetables to

roast amid the glowing coals. Then, waiting comfortably for the cannibals' return, I began to laugh.

I was washing down a well-baked taro root with the second pot of wine when the first of them crawled out of the woods and fell prostrate before me. I learned afterwards that they were deprecating my anger and were very sorry they had not recognized me as a god.

They have christened me in their own tongue *The-One-who-cannot-be-cooked*.

I wish that Pegasus would return.