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The Abyss

by Robert W. Lowndes

(Author of "A Green Cloud Came," "The Gourmet," etc.)

A tale of a ghastly journey down a little strip in the center of a rug!

WE TOOK Graf Norden's body out into the November night, under the stars that burned with a brightness terrible to behold, and drove madly, wildly up the mountain road. The body had to be destroyed because of the eyes that would not close, but seemed to be staring at some object behind the observer, the body that was entirely drained of blood without the slightest trace of a wound, the body whose flesh was covered with abhorrent, luminous markings, designs that shifted and changed form before one's eyes. We wedged what had been Graf Norden tightly behind the wheel, put a makeshift fuse in the gas tank, lit it, then shoved the car over the side of the road, where it plummeted down to the main highway, a flaming meteor.

Not until the next day did we realize that we had all been under Dureen's spell—even I had forgotten. How else could we have rushed out so eagerly, leaving him to gloat over his triumph. From that terrible moment when the lights came on again, and we saw the thing that had, a moment before, been Graf Norden, we were as shadowy, indistinct figures rushing through a dream. All was forgotten save the unspoken commands upon us as we watched the blazing car strike the pavement below, observed its demolition, then tramped dully each to his own home.

When, the next day, partial memory returned to us and we sought Dureen, he was gone. And, because we valued our freedom, we did not tell anyone what had happened, nor try to discover whence Dureen had vanished. We wanted only to forget.

I think I might possibly have forgotten had I not looked into the *Song of Yste* again. With the others, there has been a growing tendency to treat it all as illusion, but I cannot: I have learned a small part of reality. For it is one thing to read of books like the *Necronomicon*, *Book of Eibon*, or *Song of Yste*, but it is quite different when one's own experience confirms some of the dread things related therein. Many have read excerpts from the *Necronomicon*, yet are reassured by the thought that Alhazred was mad: what if they were to discover that, far from being mad, Abdul Alhazred was so terribly sane that others dubbed him mad simply because they could not bear the burden of the facts he uncovered?

Of such truths, I found one paragraph in the *Song of Yste* and have not read farther. The dark volume, along with Norden's other books, is still on my shelves; I have not burned it. But I do not think that I shall read more—but let me tell you of Dureen and Graf Norden, for around these two lie the reasons for my reluctance for the further pursuance of my studies.

I met Graf Norden at Darwich University, in Dr. Held's class in Mediaeval and early-Renaissance history, which was more a study of obscure thought, and often outright occultism.

Norden was greatly interested; he had done quite a bit of exploring into the occult; in particular was he fascinated by the writings and records of a family of adepts named Dirka, who traced their ancestry back to the pre-glacial days. They, the Dirkas, had translated the *Song of Yste* from its legendary form into the three great languages of the dawn cultures, then into the Greek, Latin, Arabic and finally, Elizabethan English.

I TOLD Norden that I deplored the blind contempt in which the world holds the occult, but had never explored the subject very deeply. I was content to be a spectator, letting my imagination drift at will upon the many currents in this dark river; skimming over the surface was enough for me—seldom did I take occasional plunges into the deeps. As a poet and dreamer, I was careful not to lose myself in the blackness of the pools where I disported—one could always emerge to find a calm, blue sky and a world that thought nothing of these realities.

With Norden, it was different. He was already beginning to have doubts, he told me. It was not an easy road to travel; there were hideous dangers, hidden all along the way, often so that the wayfarer was not aware of them until too late. Earthmen were not very far along the path of evolution; still very young, their lack of knowledge, as a race, told heavily against such few of their number who sought to traverse unknown roads. He spoke of messengers from beyond and made

references to obscure passages in the *Necronomicon* and *Song of Yste*. He spoke of alien beings, entities terribly unhuman, impossible of measurement by any human yardstick or to be combatted effectively by mankind.

Dureen came into the picture at about this time. He walked into the classroom one day during the course of a lecture; later, Dr. Held introduced him as a new member of the class, coming from abroad. There was something about Dureen that challenged my interest at once. I could not determine of what race or nationality he might be—he was very close to being beautiful, his every movement being of grace and rhythm. Yet, in no way could he be considered effeminate; he was, in a word, superb.

That the majority of us avoided him troubled him not at all. For my part, he did not seem genuine, but, with the others, it was probably his utter lack of emotion. There was, for example, the time in the lab when a test tube burst in his face, driving several splinters deep into the skin. He showed not the slightest sign of discomfort, waved aside all expressions of solicitude on the part of some of the girls, and proceeded to go on with his experiment as soon as the medico had finished with him.

The final act started when we were dealing with hypnotism, one afternoon, and were discussing the practical possibilities of the subject, following up the Rhine experiments and others. Colby presented a most ingenious argument against it, ridiculed the association of experiments in thought transference or telepathy with hypnotism, and arrived at a final conclusion that hypnotism (outside of mechanical means of induction) was impossible.

It was at this point that Dureen

spoke up. What he said, I cannot now recall, but it ended in a direct challenge for Dureen to prove his statements. Norden said nothing during the course of this debate; he appeared somewhat pale, and was, I noticed, trying to flash a warning signal to Colby. My frank opinion, now, is that Dureen had planned evoking this challenge; at the time, however, it seemed spontaneous enough.

THERE were five of us over at Norden's place that night: Granville, Chalmers, Colby, Norden, and myself. Norden was smoking endless cigarettes, gnawing his nails, and muttering to himself. I suspected something irregular was up, but what, I had no idea. Then Dureen came in and the conversation, such as it had been, ended.

Colby repeated his challenge, saying he had brought along the others as witnesses to insure against being tricked by stage devices. No mirrors, lights, or any other mechanical means of inducing hypnosis would be permitted. It must be entirely a matter of wills. Dureen nodded, drew the shade, then turned, directing his gaze at Colby.

We watched, expecting him to make motions with his hands and pronounce commands: he did neither. He fixed his eyes upon Colby and the latter stiffened as if struck by lightning, then, eyes staring blankly ahead of him, he rose slowly, standing on the narrow strip of black that ran diagonally down through the center of the rug.

My mind ran back to the day I caught Norden in the act of destroying some papers and apparatus, the latter which had been constructed, with such assistance as I had been able to give, over a period of several months. His eyes were terrible and

I could see doubt in them. Not long after this event, Dureen had made his appearance: could there have been a connection, I wondered?

My reverie was broken abruptly by the sound of Dureen's voice commanding Colby to speak, telling us where he was and what he saw around him. When Colby obeyed, it was as if his voice came to us from a distance.

He was standing, he said, on a narrow bridgeway overlooking a frightful abyss, so vast and deep that he could discern neither floor nor boundary. Behind him this bridge-way stretched until it was lost in a bluish haze; ahead, it ran toward what appeared to be a plateau. He hesitated to move because of the narrowness of the path, yet realized that he must make for the plateau before the very sight of the depths below him made him lose his balance. He felt strangely heavy, and speaking was an effort.

As Colby's voice ceased, we all gazed in fascination at the little strip of black in the blue rug. This, then, was the bridge over the abyss . . . but what could correspond to the illusion of depth? Why did his voice seem so far away? Why did he feel heavy? The plateau must be the workbench at the other end of the room: the rug ran up to a sort of dais upon which was set Norden's table, the surface of this being some seven feet above the floor. Colby now began to walk slowly down the black swath, moving as if with extreme caution, looking like a slow-motion camera-shot. His limbs appeared weighted; he was breathing rapidly.

Dureen now bade him halt and look down into the abyss carefully, telling us what he saw there. At this,

we again examined the rug, as if we had never seen it before and did not know that it was entirely without decoration save for that single black strip upon which Colby now stood.

HIS voice came to us again. He said, at first, that he saw nothing in the abyss below him. Then he gasped, swayed, and almost lost his balance. We could see the sweat standing out on his brow and neck, soaking his blue shirt. There were things in the abyss, he said in hoarse tones, great shapes that were like blobs of utter blackness, yet which he knew to be alive. From the central masses of their beings he could see them shoot forth incredibly long, filamentine tentacles. They moved themselves forward and backward—horizontally, but could not move vertically, it seemed. They were, he thought, nothing but living shadows.

But the things were not all on the same plane. True, their movements were only horizontal in relation to their position, but some were parallel to him and some diagonal. Far away he could see things perpendicular to him. There appeared now to be a great deal more of the things than he had thought. The first ones he had seen were far below, unaware of his presence. But these sensed him, and were trying to reach him. He was moving faster now, he said, but to us he was still walking in slow-motion.

I glanced sidewise at Norden; he, too, was sweating profusely. He arose now, and went over to Dureen, speaking in low tones so that none of us could hear. I knew that he was referring to Colby and that Dureen was refusing whatever it was Norden demanded. Then Dureen was forgotten momentarily as Colby's voice came

to us again, quivering with fright. The things were reaching out for him. They rose and fell on all sides; some far away; some hideously close. None had found the exact plane upon which he could be captured; the darting tentacles had not touched him, but all of the beings now sensed his presence, he was sure. And he feared that perhaps they could alter their planes at will, though, it appeared that they must do so blindly, seemingly like two-dimensional beings. The tentacles darting at him were threads of utter darkness.

A terrible suspicion arose in me, as I recalled some of the earlier conversations with Norden, and remembered certain passages from the Song of Yste. I tried to rise, but my limbs were powerless: I could only sit helplessly and watch. Norden was still speaking with Dureen and I saw that he was now very pale. He seemed to shrink away—then he turned and went over to a cabinet, took out some object, and came to the strip of rug upon which Colby was standing. Norden nodded to Dureen and now I saw what it was he held in his hand: a polyhedron of glassy appearance. There was in it, however, a glow that startled me. Desperately I tried to remember the significance of it—for I knew—but my thoughts were being short-circuited, it seemed, and, when Dureen's eyes rested upon me, the very room seemed to stagger.

Again Colby's voice came through, this time despairingly. He was afraid he would never reach the plateau. (Actually, he was about a yard and a half away from the end of the black strip and the dais upon which stood Norden's work bench.) The things, said Colby, were close now: a mass of thread-like tentacles had just missed him.

NOW Norden's voice came to us; it, too, seemingly far away. He called my name. This was more, he said, than mere hypnotism. It was—but then his voice faded and I felt the power of Dureen blanking out the sound of his words. Now and then, I would hear a sentence or a few disjointed words. But, from this I managed to get an inkling of what was going on.

This was not mere hypnotism, but actually trans-dimensional journeying. We just imagined we saw Norden and Colby standing on the rug—or perhaps it was through Dureen's influence.

The nameless dimension was the habitat of these shadow-beings. The abyss, and the bridge upon which the two stood, were illusions created by Dureen. When that which Dureen had planned was complete, our minds would be probed, and our memories treated so that we recalled no more than Dureen wished us to remember. He, Dureen, was a being of incredible power, who was using Colby and the rest of us for a nameless purpose. Norden had succeeded in forcing an agreement upon Dureen, one which he would have to keep; as a result, if the two could reach the plateau before the shadow-beings touched them, all would be well. If not—Norden did not specify, but indicated that they were being hunted, as men hunt game. The polyhedron contained an element repulsive to the things.

He was but a little behind Colby; we could see him aiming with the polyhedron. Colby spoke again, telling us that Norden had materialized behind him, and had brought some sort of weapon with which the things could be held off.

Then Norden called my name, asking me to take care of his belongings

if he did not return, telling me to look up the "adumbrali" in the *Song of Yste*. Slowly, he and Colby made their way toward the dais and the table. Colby was but a few steps ahead of Norden; now he climbed upon the dais, and, with the other's help, made his way onto the bench. He tried to assist Norden, but, as the latter mounted the dais, he stiffened suddenly and the polyhedron fell from his hands. Frantically he tried to draw himself up, but he was being forced backward and I knew that he had lost. . . .

There came to us a single cry of anguish, then the lights in the room faded and went out. Whatever spell had been upon us now was removed; we rushed about like madmen, trying to find Norden, Colby, and the light switch. Then, suddenly, the lights were on again and we saw Colby sitting dazedly on the bench, while Norden lay on the floor. Chalmers bent over the body, in an effort to resuscitate him, but when he saw the condition of Norden's remains he became so hysterical that we had to knock him cold in order to quiet him.

COLBY FOLLOWED us mechanically, apparently unaware of what was happening. We took Graf Norden's body out into the November night and destroyed it by fire, telling Colby later that he had apparently suffered a heart attack while driving up the mountain road; the car had gone over and his body was almost completely destroyed in the holocaust.

Later, Chalmers, Granville, and I met in an effort to rationalize what we had seen and heard. Chalmers had been all right after he came around, had helped us with our grisly errand up the mountain road. Neith-

er, I found, had heard Norden's voice after he had joined Colby in the supposed hypnotic stage. So, it was as I thought: Dureen's power had blanked out the sound of Norden's voice for them completely. Nor did they recall seeing any object in Norden's hand.

But, in less than a week, even these memories had faded from them. They fully believed that Norden had died in an accident after an unsuccessful attempt on the part of Dureen to hypnotize Colby. Prior to this, their explanation had been that Dureen had killed Norden, for reasons unknown, and that we had been his unwitting accomplices. The hypnotic experiment had been a blind to gather us all together and provide a means of disposing of the body. That Dureen had been able to hypnotize us, they did not doubt then. The illusion of the abyss, they said, was just a cruel joke. . . .

IT IS NO USE telling them what I learned a few days later, what I learned from Norden's notes which explain Dureen's arrival. Or to quote sections from the *Song of Yste* to them. Yet, I must set these things down. In that accursed book is a section dealing with an utterly alien race of entities known as the *adumbrali*.

" . . . And these be none other than the adumbrali, the living shadows, beings of incredible power and malignancy, which dwell without the veils of space and time such as

we know it. Their sport it is to import into their realm the inhabitants of other dimensions, upon whom they practice horrid pranks and manifold illusions . . ."

" . . . But more dreadful than these are the seekers which they send out into other worlds and dimensions, beings of incredible power which they themselves have created and guised in the form of those who dwell within whatever dimension, or upon whichever worlds where these seekers be sent . . ."

" . . . These seekers can be detected only by the adept, to whose trained eyes their too-perfectness of form and movement, their strangeness, and aura of alienage and power is a sure sign. . . ."

*" . . . The sage, Jhalkanaan, tells of one of these seekers who deluded seven priests of Nyughoggua into challenging it to a duel of the hypnotic arts. He further tells how two of these were trapped and delivered to the *adumbrali*, their bodies being returned when the shadow-things had done with them . . ."*

" . . . Most curious of all was the condition of the corpses, being entirely drained of all fluid, yet showing no trace of a wound, even the most slight. But the crowning horror was the eyes, which could not be closed, appearing to stare restlessly outward, beyond the observer, and the strangely-luminous markings on the dead flesh, curious designs which appeared to move and change form before the eyes of the beholder. . . ."

