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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

The Amulet of Hell

By ROBERT LEONARD RUSSELL

What ghastly creature was he who called himself G. Kodopolis?

I HAD been walking in the drizzling rain for some time when I first came to the dingy little curio shop whose faded sign announced: "G. Kodopolis—Curios." It was on a narrow, dirty street in a part of town with which I was totally unfamiliar.

The hour was well toward midnight, but a light was burning in the shop and, although the place had a queerly alien aspect, I felt a sudden, inexplicable urge to enter it. So I pushed open the door and went in.

Once inside, I scarcely noticed the merchandise lining the grimy walls, for my eyes fell immediately upon the only other person in the place, and he was indeed singular enough to claim my whole attention. The man was tall, skeleton-thin in his strangely dark and baggy garments, and the portion of his face that showed above the tangled beard was like nothing more than yellowed parchment stretched over a skull. But his eyes drew me most; large, jet-black, they seemed to gaze into my innermost being, and from them emanated a peculiar force of their own.

I started to speak, but words would not come; I tried to move, but my muscles refused to obey my brain. I could only stare into those eyes and lose myself in their depths. A wave of blackness swept over me and I recall nothing else that happened until I stumbled out into the street some time later, clutching some small, hard object tightly in one hand.

I walked along dazedly for a time; then I found myself quite unexpectedly at the door of my apartment house. I climbed

the stairs to my rooms, threw myself fully dressed across the bed, and immediately fell asleep.

IT WAS late next morning when I awoke with a listless feeling and a slight pain at my throat. I was stiff and cramped from sleeping in my clothes, and a small hard something was boring into the middle of my back. I rolled over, found the object, and held it up to the light.

It was an amulet, a rosary of black beads hung with an inverted crucifix bearing the form of an obscene satyr in place of the pendent Christ. It was evidently the thing I had carried from the curio shop, and it puzzled me quite as much as did the strange incidents of the past night.

I stayed in my room all that day, for a strange lethargy possessed me. It was accompanied by a peculiar depression of spirits that increased almost to melancholia as the day wore on and darkness approached. Several times I tried to lose myself in some book or other, but the printed pages had no appeal for me, and ever and anon something came in between my eyes and the words before me—it was the face of the old man in the curio shop, G. Kodopolis.

I went early to bed, but sleep evaded me. I tossed fitfully on my bed for hours before slumber at last claimed me. And slumber brought horrid dreams to plague me.

I was sitting on my bed in the black nothingness of interstellar space, and a hissing *thing* came to gnaw at my throat,

a thing with the face of G. Kodopolis, the shopkeeper. Then I plunged down into a black well that had no bottom, and the scene vanished, leaving only his eyes. So the dream ended.

I awoke next morning with the same feeling of apathy that I had experienced before. I called in Doctor McGee, an unimaginative, stolid individual, who examined me mechanically and gave his diagnosis.

"Looks like anemia, Mr. Trellan," he said when he had finished, "but I can't be certain as yet. Just rest for a few days and then we can tell more about it."

The doctor had hardly gone when Pietro Jachini, an Italian friend of mine from across the hall, came in to see me. He gave me one careful look and his eyes widened in horror.

"*Dio*, Jim," he gasped, "it is devil's work!"

He insisted on examining my neck. Then he brought a mirror and showed me what he had found: two tiny punctures in the skin over my jugular vein. With a shock, the dreams of the past night came back to me.

"Jim," Jachini began in what seemed rather ludicrous earnestness, "something has happened. What is it? You must tell me of anything out of the way that has happened to you recently. I want to help you, and God knows you'll need help."

So I told him of my queer experience in the little old shop in the fog. When I came to a description of G. Kodopolis, my friend's olive face blanched and he muttered something, ending with:

"It is even worse than I thought from your wan appearance and the marks on your throat. You have heard of vampires, have you not, Jim?"

"Of course, Pietro," I began, "but you surely don't think *he* is a vampire? Why,

such things exist only in outworn superstitions, and——" I broke off at the look he gave me.

"No, not a vampire," Jachini said; "that is what I thought at first, but your description of him . . . tell me, Jim, did he *give* you anything?"

I nodded, found the amulet among the papers and books on my table and handed it to him. He gave the thing one look, crossed himself and dropped it back on the table.

Excusing himself hurriedly, Pietro rushed across the hall to his own room. I lay back, staring at the ceiling and wondering what it was all about. My meeting with Kodopolis, my hideous dreams, the punctures on my neck, Pietro's queer actions and his mention of the old superstition of vampires—what could it all mean?

IN A few minutes Jachini was back, carrying a small, black-bound volume. Without a word, he sat down and began to turn through it. I caught a momentary glimpse of the title page: the name of the book was *Vampyrs*. At length Pietro found the section he had sought, and he began to read the queer sentences aloud.

"The *vrykolokas* of Greek superstition," he read in his rich, scarcely accented voice, "is the undead body of some exceedingly vicious mortal. It lives not, yet is not dead, existing on fresh blood of hapless men. Unlike the true vampire, it is not shut within a coffin by day, but is then listless and inactive, especially if it has fed the night previous. Not like other vampires, the *vrykolokas* eats of the bodies of its victims when all blood is exhausted.

"The creature is unaffected by sacred tokens, excepting the image of our Lord on His tree. The stake, the knife, and the silver bullet are alike useless against the

monster, as are all mortal weapons. Only fire may destroy a *vrykolokas*. Yet he binds himself to a victim by some link such as an amulet or a witch-mark, and the victim is freed if the link be in some manner broken."

I started at the mention of an amulet. Did all this have some hidden significance to me? I would have interrupted Jachini, but he motioned me to silence and read on:

"The *vrykolokas* may be distinguished by its odd skin like old papyrus, its hypnotic eyes, by abnormal hair-growings upon its visage, and its emaciation. It is——"

Then I screamed. Jachini must have dropped the book and stared at me, but I was unaware of anything save that the description of the *vrykolokas* in the old book would have served equally well to describe G. Kodopolis. An icy trickle ran down my spine as the awful truth forced itself upon me—Kodopolis was a *vrykolokas* and I was his victim.

"So you see it, too, Jim," said Jachini understandingly.

"Yes, yes," I gasped, "I see it all now. Pietro, the amulet, *destroy it*—it must be the link, and the book says——"

Jachini picked up the blasphemous rosary, crossed to the fireplace, and tossed the thing into the midst of the glowing embers. It landed upright, stuck, and the little flames licked around it. Yet it remained unblemished by the radiance, and slowly the fire began to recede until the dread token was left on a tiny heap of dead coals in the center of the fire. Jachini shrugged, then dragged the thing from the fire onto the hearthstone.

"I feared as much," he said, "but there is yet another way. I shall weight the thing with a stone and drop it off the Park Street bridge—once in the river it will be gone for ever."

He took the thing and left. In a little while he came back to tell me that it was done. So, with that hellish trinket gone, I felt certain that my troubles were over. I spent the rest of the day in greater peace of mind, and went to bed directly after dinner, to fall asleep almost at once.

I slept soundly for an hour or so, when I was awakened by a knock at my door. I answered it, to find a messenger boy with a parcel for me. I took it, tossed it on the table unopened, and went back to sleep.

I SLEPT this time until the sun, streaming in my window next morning, woke me, but my sleep was haunted by dreams in which old Kodopolis crept again into my room to sink his fangs into my throat.

When I got up next day, I opened the package that had been delivered to me. A hand of ice gripped my spine as I saw what it contained. In the box was the hideous little amulet that Pietro Jachini had thrown into the river and, in that moment, I knew that my dreadful dreams of the night just past were no dreams at all but hideous reality.

I passed the whole of that day in a horror of anticipation, for I knew that with the coming of night, the monster that called itself Kodopolis would again visit me.

Doctor McGee called again during the day. If he but knew the true cause of my ailment it might shock him out of his stolid composure. But he would only think me a madman if I should tell him the truth.

Jachini spent much of the time with me. He sat by my bed while I told him of the return of the amulet and of my *dreams*. He insisted on remaining with me that night, but I refused, for a plan was taking form in my mind; yet if it

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The Amulet of Hell

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failed I feared that I might draw my friend, too, into the toils of the monster, Kodopolis. So as night drew on he reluctantly took his leave and I was left alone.

I lay on my bed in the darkness for a long time. I felt that the end was not far off, for I could not stand many more visits by the *vrykolokas*, and if my plan failed all my blood would soon be gone and the thing would come again—to eat.

I looked toward a window at the far end of the room. There, lit by the glow of near-by street lamps, was a face I knew only too well. That yellow, bearded skull and those evil eyes could belong to no other than the monstrous G. Kodopolis himself.

A sort of hypnosis began to creep over me, my eyelids drooped, my tense muscles relaxed. I had no will to struggle, though I felt the weight of the *vrykolokas* on my chest, felt his sharp teeth at my throat. Then, as the very blood of life commenced to drain from my body, I lapsed into complete unconsciousness. . . .

Slowly I fought my way back to sensibility. The monster had feasted and fled again into the darkness; yet I could still feel the terrible power of him about me. I knew I must act at once, for I was so weak that Kodopolis' next visitation must certainly be his last, and I could visualize those rending fangs and talons at work. . . .

I pushed back the covers and got to my feet. I was weak and giddy, but I knew what I must do. I dressed in a few minutes, slipped downstairs into the dark street, and began to walk. The influence of Kodopolis drew me to his lair as a magnet draws steel; yet I can not to this day retrace my steps to the street where I came at last to the ancient shop.

THE door was unlocked, and I pushed my way into the dusty old place. I went straight back to the curtains that shut off the rear of the shop, and through them into the room beyond.

On a long couch in the center of the room lay the *vrykolokas* himself, his evil yellow face passive, his dark eyes mercifully closed.

I withdrew quickly from the monster's chamber, my mind all alert now. I must hasten to my task before the creature sensed something amiss. The old book Jachini had read to me had said: "*Only fire may totally destroy a vrykolokas.*" And Kodopolis' shop was a veritable tinder-box. A match dropped in one of the stacks of old books that littered the place would start a blaze that would soon spread to the dry, ancient wood of the walls. The result would be a holocaust.

I swept a stack of the old volumes to the floor and touched a match to their crumbling pages. The flames licked over them hungrily, and I fed the blaze with more books, then with wooden sections from the shelves. The fire spread rapidly.

So intent was I upon my work that I all but missed the slight sound as the curtains behind me parted. But I heard in time and turned to see G. Kodopolis standing in the entrance to the back room. He stared dazedly at the fire; then his dark eyes blazed with ferocity as he saw me. With an animal snarl he leaped forward.

The flames were roaring up the walls now, painting the whole grim scene a hellish red. Desperately I seized a burning brand from the fire and hurled it into the monster's leering face. Fire licked at his flowing beard, caught in his dark garments. He shrieked once, horribly, and toppled back into the fire.

As Kodopolis disappeared in the roaring inferno, I jerked open the door, threw

myself out into the darkness, and ran. I ran until I was near exhaustion; then I fell. My head met something hard and I became unconscious.

I came to in a hospital bed, my head bandaged and strangely light. I called a nurse and questioned her. She told me that I had been found lying unconscious in the street early that morning and I had been brought to the hospital with a deep head-wound and a slight concussion.

I was allowed no visitors that day, but the next afternoon Pietro Jachini came to see me. I told him the conclusion of the affair and he sat quiet through my recital, nodding a bit now and then at some incident.

When Pietro returned, the following day, he brought some newspapers, including every issue of the past few days. We looked through each of them with utmost care, but there was no mention of the fire in the curio shop. Yet the conflagration was so fierce that no power on earth, or even those of hell that were at Kodopolis' command, could have saved the old shop from complete destruction.

So the tale ends, but sometimes, even now, I dream and doubt for a time that G. Kodopolis' horrid undead existence is at an end. Still, the creature must have been destroyed in the fire; for though I still have his hellish amulet, the link between us, he has never again come to me.