

# Weird Tales

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# The BRAIN in the JAR



by NORMAN ELWOOD HAMMERSTROM  
and R.F. SEARIGHT

FOR the fifth time in less than an hour the call bell clanged noisily. Automatically Verne Eldridge, the orderly, rose from his chair and slipped silently down the dimly lit corridor of the old Berlin hospital. Merely another fretful patient demanding attention. Eldridge sighed. He possessed an adventure-loving soul and a capacity for daring which, during the war, had helped to make him one of the most trusted and efficient members of the American intelligence department, and which naturally enough chafed mightily under the monotony of his present forced inaction.

Not but that his position even now was sufficiently dangerous. Eldridge was well aware that he had escaped the Wilhelmstrasse agents by what seemed a miracle. He knew that as long as they believed him to be in Germany, and thus far there had been absolutely no opportunity for escape, they would be constantly on the alert for his capture and arrest. Though the armistice had been signed, Eldridge well knew that one who had done so much as himself towards the downfall of the Kaiser's forces would have earned the private vengeance of the imperialists. Even now he was convinced from certain veiled remarks that Doctor Jaeger, the physician in charge, suspected his secret. Eldridge was treading on very thin ice and was fully aware of the fact. He had been employed as orderly in the hospital for nearly two months now, posing

as a wounded German soldier of whose papers he had possessed himself, and he knew that it was only a matter of time before the ruse would be discovered.

It was well into March of 1919. The night was cold and foggy, and fitful gusts of rain were dashed against the windows by the high wind which had come up at sunset. The gale moaned and shrieked among the towers and turrets of the ancient pile, which trembled slightly under the heavier shocks. A fitting night for murder and crime of all sorts, thought the impressionable Eldridge, as he sleepily made his way back to his room.

As he approached the stairs leading to the basement, he perceived Dr. Jaeger himself standing beside them in a rather listless attitude. Although it was three o'clock in the morning, it was nothing unusual for the famous scientist and research worker to keep even later hours in his private laboratory. At present he was standing relaxed, smoking a cigaret, and no doubt planning his next day's research program. A slender, erect man of medium height was the doctor, with sharp, strong features accentuated by a neatly trimmed black beard. Rumors were afloat in scientific circles regarding certain experiments successfully carried out by Jaeger in the preservation of living tissues in special liquids, although as yet he had given out nothing to the world. The doctor had previously come into renown from several chemical innovations pertain-

ing to the composition of some of the poison gases used by the German armies which he had perfected during the war. At present his position at the hospital was a sinecure, to aid him in carrying on extensive investigations in tissue preservation. So much Eldridge knew from the report of a fellow operative, since deceased. From his own observation he knew Jaeger to be a cold, hard man, utterly without scruples and having a deep vein of cruelty in his nature which manifested itself from time to time in various characteristic acts.

As Eldridge passed, the doctor gave him a short "good morning" and turned to descend the stairs. Doubtless, thought Eldridge, he was going to the basement for chemicals, having perhaps run out of some compound needed to complete the experiment which had kept him working so late.

Eldridge passed on and was turning down the corridor leading to his own room when, above the roar of the wind and steady beat of the rain, a door slammed loudly. For a moment he failed to perceive its significance. Then he pulled up sharply and listened, for it dawned upon his sleepy mind that the noise had come from behind a door which he had always supposed to open on a fire escape. This was curious indeed, and his mind became instantly alert as he realized the possible significance of his discovery. His professional training and natural curiosity overcoming his caution, Eldridge stepped to the door and turned the knob.

The door proved to be unlocked and he entered quickly, closing it behind him. He found himself in a narrow hallway lit dimly by a single bulb in the ceiling. Fully resolved now to investigate the mystery of this part of the building, Eldridge passed quickly to the end of the corridor, where he found it turned sharply to

the left. A few yards further on he arrived at a second door, doubtless, he thought, the one which had slammed. He opened it cautiously and slipped in, the draft closing it after him.

He found himself in a fairly large room fitted up as a laboratory. A drop-light on one of the two large tables cast a circle of bright light over the table, leaving the rest of the room in deep shadow. As his eyes became accustomed to the shaded light, he saw that the place was lined with shelves holding row above row of chemical supplies as well as numerous glass containers of various sizes and shapes. These latter were filled with liquids in which floated, in perfect preservation, various parts of the human anatomy. The tables were littered with retorts, test tubes, bunsen burners, microscopes, surgical and dissecting instruments, in fact all the varied paraphernalia of the research chemist and physiologist. On the left was a small anteroom, and beside it and projecting partly in front of its doorway, was a large cage containing several full grown guinea pigs. An expensive X-ray outfit and various photographic apparatus stood in one corner.

It flashed on Eldridge's mind that he had stumbled on the private laboratory of Dr. Jaeger. He had never known the exact location of this room, as the doctor always entered it from his private office, which he invariably kept locked during his absence. No doubt, thought the spy, the anteroom led to the office. He quickly realized that his presence here was not without considerable danger, for the scientist would hardly have taken such elaborate precautions in regard to the privacy of his laboratory had he not had something to conceal. Eldridge began to feel decidedly nervous. The violently raging elements without did not help to dispel this feeling.

HE HAD almost decided to retire and leave his investigation for a more favorable time when his attention was arrested by a large glass jar, resting on a shelf above the rows of drugs and chemicals on the right wall. It caught his eye first through the elaborate apparatus connected with it—then by its contents.

The jar was spherical in shape with a large circular mouth fitted with a ground glass stopper, having a German cross for a knob. Above was a large nickel-plated tank and extending from it to the jar a slender glass tube controlled by a system of valves. Another tube, also fitted with valves, projected from the jar close to the base, disappearing into the wall. Both tubes were fitted with delicate thermometers.

Eldridge observed most of these details later. At present his attention was riveted upon the contents of the jar, which seemed to consist of a purple black fluid. As he stared, the hue gradually changed to a deep red and slowly became clear. Then, in the depths of the jar, the amazed spy beheld two glowing red spots, gleaming through the murky liquid like the eyes of a wolf in the dark. Then, as the fluid became perfectly transparent, he saw what appeared to be two naked human eyes glaring down at him with ferocious intensity. He fell back aghast, staring in amazement at this phenomenon, and as he looked, the liquid slowly resumed its former opacity till it had regained the original purple black hue. Then it again grew transparent and the whole phenomenon was repeated.

Three times Eldridge witnessed this curious change. Then, gathering his courage, he climbed up on the table nearer to the jar so that he was but a few feet from it, with his eyes on the same level. As the liquid cleared once more, he saw a human brain in perfect preservation, resting on a soft membranous cushion. The cushion

lay on a glass pedestal which projected about halfway up from the bottom of the jar. Extending from the brain were two cords, which crossed each other and dropped to the bottom of the jar, terminating in the two human eyes that Eldridge had first seen in the semi-darkness of the laboratory. The entire hideous spectacle resembled a huge snail.

Eldridge had lost track of the passage of time since entering the strange and sinister laboratory of Dr. Jaeger, but now his subconsciously alert senses detected the sound of a door slamming far down the outer corridor. It must be the doctor returning from the basement, Eldridge thought, and he hastily slipped from the table and out into the narrow hallway, being careful this time that the door did not slam. As he reached the door opening into the outer corridor, he heard footsteps rapidly approaching and slipped behind the door just as the doctor entered. Jaeger closed the door without a backward glance and hurried down the corridor. He passed the corner without turning his head, but Eldridge waited until he heard the sound of the laboratory door closing, and then hurried to his room.

WHAT he had witnessed in Dr. Jaeger's secret laboratory had made a deep impression upon Eldridge, but it was some time before he had another opportunity to visit the weird room. The doctor always kept both doors locked, and doubtless only the late hour and his intention to return at once had caused him to relax his vigilance on the night Eldridge made his first visit. Furthermore he was nearly always there in person, working on his endless experiments. But finally after nearly three weeks Jaeger was called to Carlsbad for a consultation, and Eldridge realized that his chance for closer investigation had come.

He waited until after midnight. Then, making sure that he was not ob-

served, he unlocked the doors with skeleton keys and entered the laboratory. He found it very much as he had left it on his previous visit except that the place was in total darkness. He located the switch by means of his pocket flash and turned on the table drop-light. He had ascertained after his first visit that the room contained no windows that might show the illumination to any one passing by outside, and in view of the doctor's absence, he thought himself fairly safe from interruption. He had brought a pad of paper and a pencil, and now seated himself on the table in order to bring his eyes nearer to the level of the jar, and proceeded to make a rapid sketch of the jar and its contents.

As Eldridge was putting the final touches to the drawing, he had a distinct and vivid impression that his name had been called. His auditory nerves had registered nothing; of that he was certain, but the impression was too real to be lightly dismissed. He glanced nervously about, but no other living thing was present aside from the guinea pigs in their cage.

Again came that vivid impression of his name being pronounced. He looked up to see the glaring eyes of the brain fading gradually from sight as the liquid in the jar grew opaque. As he stared the fluid again regained its transparency and the glowing eyes seemed to be boring through his very brain. His head swam, he clutched at the table for support and then lost consciousness.

He returned to his senses as from a black void, with all the mental sensations of emerging from ether. He had no means of telling the length of time that had passed during his trance, but glancing at his watch he saw that it was only a little after one o'clock, so he concluded that it must have been brief.

Then, looking down at his sketch, he saw a line in French written across the bottom in his own handwriting. He was considerably surprized, not to say alarmed, and with a final glance at the eyes, now disappearing into the liquid, he turned to the door. Suddenly he stopped with a gasp of terror. Suspended motionless in thin air, before his eyes, hung an empty test tube. As he shrank back the tube dropped and crashed to pieces on the floor. Retaining only enough presence of mind to switch out the light, Eldridge ran from the laboratory, more frightened by this than by any other of the phenomena which he had witnessed.

Translated, the message on his sketch proved to read: "Be in the laboratory tomorrow at midnight." Brief and to the point, thought Eldridge, and he gave much thought during the day to the curious communication.

He saw Dr. Jaeger returning from his consultation late in the afternoon, and with some misgivings he repaired to the laboratory at midnight armed with an automatic. He found the room empty. Jaeger, tired by his journey, had retired early.

Seated again before the brain, the spy soon passed into a hypnotic trance precisely similar to the one he had undergone the night before. He emerged as on the previous occasion, as if from a black void, and looking down at his tablet, found that several sheets were closely covered with his handwriting in French. He hastened to his room and began to translate the script.

As he proceeded, horror and amazement at the gruesome tale halted him again and again, but he finally completed the task and the whole weird story lay before him. In the name of the dictator he recognized that of a famous French spy who had disappeared just before the signing of the armistice.

"MY NAME is Jean Perrin" (read the script). "Possibly you have heard of me, Mr. Eldridge, for, with all modesty, I may say that my work did a great deal toward the downfall of the German forces. When I was finally captured and exposed on November fifth of last year, the Wilhelmstrasse officials swore vengeance upon me, peace or no peace. But I knew that my work was well done and that the end of the war could be but a few days off.

"Col. Von Uhlman, head of the secret service, had me brought before him for a private interview in which he tried to extract from me full details regarding the extent of the information I had managed to furnish our leaders. Col. Von Uhlman failed utterly in his purpose, and it enraged him to such an extent that he swore I should die on the day the war ended. I bowed mockingly as I left his presence, but though I never saw him again, he kept his word.

"All was bustle and confusion preceding the Great Day, but when it dawned it brought with it a dead quiet, which told me, in solitary confinement, better than any words could have done, that the thing we had waited and worked and died for during more than four long years had at last been accomplished.

"For safer keeping I was confined, not in the Berlin prison, but in a small room in a turret of the old castle of Prince Otto Von Machstein just outside Berlin. Two armed guards stood without my door day and night and my food was passed to me through a small slide window in the door. They were taking no chances with Jean Perrin. It is with a little pardonable pride that I recall how carefully they watched me and their conversation outside my door, which showed how they feared my escape. And it was to good purpose—for them. Much as I plotted, carefully as I searched my mind, there was no possible chance

for freedom in the limited time given me. The Great Day of the armistice found me still a prisoner.

"Late that night a guard of eight came clanking down the corridor, their heavy boots raising echoes throughout the old castle. Their leader, a heavy-set, brutal-faced sergeant, unlocked the door for the first time in nearly a week and confronted me with an evil grin on his seared countenance. Perhaps he knew of the fate in store for me. I think so now I made no resistance as they handcuffed my wrists and led me from the castle. In silence we entered an armored car, and after an hour or more of rapid driving arrived at this hospital.

"Through the long, dimly lit corridors the clanking guard preceded and followed me, and finally we reached the operating room. The light was poor here, as elsewhere in the building, but in the center of the room stood the operating table, illumined by a cold blue cone of light from the powerful electric lamp overhead. The room seemed filled with doctors and nurses, shrouded in white, and at the head of the table stood an instrument-tray covered with the glittering paraphernalia of the surgeon. Ah, I shudder as I recall those fearful moments! I was seized and overpowered, for, handcuffed as I was, my resistance was feeble. Stripped of my clothes and attired in an antiseptic white gown, I was thrown upon the table and my hands and feet strapped to its legs. My head was strapped down, and then Dr. Jaeger, a cruel smile on his face (he had not yet donned his operating mask like the others, though otherwise in full operating attire), stepped up and addressed me.

"*Mon Dieu*, the horror of what that snake-blooded demon told me! It rings in my ears even now when I am past all caring. He told me of his successful experiments in keeping

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# The Brain in the Jar

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alive in his special fluids various parts of the human body. And I was to be the subject of his crowning experiment, an attempt to keep the human brain alive *and functioning!*

"Can you imagine the horror of that scene to me, a living, normal man? Can you picture that dim room, its atmosphere heavy with the odors of disinfectants and anesthetics, with the white-robed figures of doctors and nurses, shrouded to the eyes, flitting about silently as ghosts, as they prepared the instruments and anesthetics for this frightful crime? It was almost more than the human mind could endure, and I nearly lost my self-control. Then I read the meaning of the evil grin on Dr. Jaeger's face and knew that he was waiting for me to break down and beg for mercy. What pleasure so exquisite for him as to refuse it and perhaps make the torture worse in some way

for the mere pleasure of gloating over my suffering? I gritted my teeth and swore that come what might no cry, no sign of quailing would they wring from me.

"Dr. Jaeger stared long and piercingly into my eyes. What he saw there must have convinced him of my determination, for he made an abrupt sign of disgust and gave the order for the anesthetic. I held myself rigid and taut as the ether nozzle was placed over my nose and mouth, shutting out from my lungs forever the oxygen that gives life. But I breathed deeply of the lethal fumes, for oblivion was heaven after that scene of hell.

"I WILL never know, I suppose, just how long my consciousness was suspended. I do not think it was more than a few days, but again it might have been weeks. My first sensations were too frightful for descrip-

tion. I can give but a poor idea of the agony I endured. But it was all in one place, seemingly within my cranium. Alas, I did not know then that my cranium was reduced to ashes! A million demons might have been stabbing at my brain with red-hot needles. Darkness, a terrible roaring, were all about. Is this the end? I thought. Am I in the abode of the damned? For the torture of those moments seemed to me impossible except in the place taught by the faith of my childhood to be the final home of evil. Thought, concentration, were impossible. I have only the memory of the sensations. The noise increased, grew unbearable. A cracking, shrieking roar, mounting higher and higher, seemed about to split the ear drums I no longer had. Then oblivion for another indeterminate period. With returning consciousness the symptoms gradually subsided, and at length I was able to observe an alternate change of light to darkness and darkness to light occurring about once every two minutes. During the light periods I became able to distinguish objects, and slowly I regained my normal power of vision. I saw that I was in a large and fully equipped laboratory—the room in which you are sitting tonight. But what was my horror to perceive in a mirror on the opposite wall, not myself as I had been in life, but this glass jar wherein you see me, and within it my own brain and eyeballs attached thereto by their nerve cords. And then I knew that Jaeger's accursed experiment had succeeded. I, my living brain, was functioning in his liquid. Far better, I thought, had death claimed me.

“From then on I lived in a world devoid of all sensations of sound, odor or feeling. My first terrible agonies had been due to the irritation of the ends of the severed spinal cord and sensory nerves. Nothing was left me now but my sense of sight—thanks to



the surgical skill of that ingenious fiend.

"The eternal silence was oppressive, maddening. I prayed for death in vain, for I possessed no material body with which to execute self-destruction. My mind and personality were helplessly chained to this lump of clay called the brain.

"Then I found something to live for.

"Every day comes the doctor to work long hours at his experiments, sometimes with chemicals, test tubes and retorts, sometimes with tissue and microscopes or again with strange photographic apparatus. And every night before he leaves he comes and stares at me for many minutes. He knows that the tissue of my brain lives, but he has as yet found no way of determining whether or not it functions. And it pleases me to keep him in ignorance, for the day of my vengeance is very near. That is what I have found to live for.

"I have learned a great deal since my incarceration here, among other things, that Dr. Jaeger, whatever may be his nature and personal character, is one of the world's great scientists, a specialist in many things, in all of which he excels. I have learned, too, something of the manner in which I am kept alive here. The tube leading into the jar from above connects with the nickel tank, which contains a supply of the secret fluid. The valves are arranged to let the fluid pass very slowly through the jar, finding egress through the lower valves and out through the tube which they control. The liquid is nutritious and at body temperature. A subtle, periodical chemical reaction causes the color change, designed to protect my naked eyes from the light. Beyond the fact that the fluid has a chemical similarity to human blood and contains a colorless compound carrying oxygen, I have no knowledge of its composition.

"But I have learned much more

than this. With nothing to do, week after week, I have worked at the one thing that was left to me. I have developed my will power. From the will of an ordinary man I have increased its strength till my powers now would astound any psychologists—even those who suspect the possibilities of the human will. And I have used it to the harm of the enemy, though my only aim now is my personal vengeance on Jaeger. In the last week there have been twelve murders, six suicides and eight insanity cases, all of noted German officials of the worst type. Among them was Colonel Von Uhlman. These acts were all caused by the hypnotic suggestions which I have made by telepathy.

“And I have advanced even farther than this. I have done what has never been accomplished before. Today my will is so highly developed that by simply exerting it I can move small objects. The suspended flask you saw last night was a demonstration. Were I to continue, the time would come soon when nothing would be impossible for me. My powers would be such that I might rule the world through strength of will. But I have no desire for that. Existence is misery, and when I have accomplished my revenge I shall be glad to leave life, in earnest this time.

“It is by means of my telepathic power that I have thrown you into the hypnotic trance which now claims you, and, using your hand, have written down my story. If you would witness my vengeance on Dr. Jaeger, conceal yourself in the small room behind the guinea pig cage tomorrow night. Be there by nine o'clock as Jaeger, whose mind I read, will come soon after.”

**T**HUS ended a manuscript which surpassed by far in grisly horror, gruesome detail and stark improbabil-

ity anything that Eldridge had ever imagined possible. He passed the day as though in a trance, his mind running constantly on the extraordinary communication. He had no doubts, after the first natural questionings of his mind, as to the authenticity of the strange message, and so nine o'clock found him concealed as directed, with his automatic ready.

He had not been long hidden when Dr. Jaeger entered from his office and without looking around set about his work. He began slicing, for microscopic examination, tissue from a living human arm taken from one of the jars. A half hour or more passed, broken only by an occasional cough or exclamation of satisfaction from the doctor as the examination proceeded, apparently to his complete satisfaction. Eldridge did not grow impatient. The uncanny affair held him enthralled.

Then a slight movement above the doctor's head caught his eye. For the first time he noticed a huge wax bottle of hydrofluoric acid on a shelf directly over that section of the table whereon the scientist was engaged. Jaeger had been using the deadly stuff for certain silicon determinations of the tissue.

Again the slight movement, and now Eldridge saw that it was this bottle sliding forward a few inches. Slowly, all but imperceptibly, so as not to alarm the worker below, it slid forward toward the edge of the shelf. Unconsciously Eldridge estimated the distance it must fall to reach the doctor—some five or six feet. Involuntarily he was tempted to warn the unsuspecting physician, but the glittering eyes of the brain seemed to render his will powerless.

The bottle was now projecting some inches beyond the edge of the shelf. Eldridge started to cry out, but found himself unable to speak. He tried to rise but was unable to move a muscle. Suddenly the doctor looked up, perhaps warned by some premonition of

his impending doom. If so, it came too late. Into his eyes came the look of a hunted animal as he saw the jar of deadly acid poised directly over his head. The bottle came hurtling downward as he started to rise and struck him full in the face, smashing to bits, while the acid gushed over his body. He fell to the floor writhing and shrieking in his death agony. The vengeance of Jean Perrin was accomplished.

Meanwhile the acid vigorously attacked the woodwork and glassware and flames soon sprang up from the heat of the reaction. A bottle of sodium exploded and row after row of bottles came crashing down, their chemical contents adding fuel and impetus to the flames.

Eldridge's escape via the corridor had been cut off from the first, and the scene held him fascinated. He made no attempt to leave through the doctor's office as he might have done at first. His present position had become one of great danger, owing to the explosive nature of some of the chemicals which had not yet been touched by the flames. The laboratory was rapidly becoming a raging inferno. High above all stood the jar and its contents, which had brought this thing to pass. The red eyes of the brain glittered triumphantly through the smoke and flames. Jaeger had become motionless. Then suddenly the shelf gave way and brain and jar crashed into the fire and disappeared. Long tongues of flame shot up to the very ceiling. Then came a bursting roar; a flying bottle struck Eldridge on the temple and oblivion descended.

**W**HEN Eldridge returned to consciousness, he found himself swathed in bandages on board a hospital ship bound for New York. His wife was with him, also his friend and co-worker, Felton, of the secret service, who, with a detachment sent from the American Army of Occupation,

had effected his rescue from the burning hospital.

To them he related his weird tale, and with shattered nerves and seared body resigned himself to his wife's loving care. Her love alone can efface from his mind the effects of the memory of the vengeance of the brain in the jar.      **THE END**