

# The Magazine of Prophetic Fiction

## WONDER Stories

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### ON THE COVER THIS MONTH

taken from Arthur G. Stangland's "Fatal Equation" we see the mathematician Macmillan escaping from his accusers by stepping into the time vortex. Almost instantly he vanishes.

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# THE DIMENSION TWISTER

BY HUGH KING HARRIS

● Seated before a teakwood desk, smoking a long, slender cigar meditatively, Kent Forbs, B.S., M.C., Ph.L., in short the famous scientist, occultist, and sometime aide to Stan Wycks, astute crime investigator—reached out and lifted the receiver of the continental telephone before him.

His dark, deep-set eyes glowed with that curious fire flaring when his inner spirit of research was aroused. Only monosyllables, as he heard his friend Wycks sketch another mysterious disappearance, this time with direct reference to the weathered brick house on Achilles Square.

For a long moment his body remained tense; only the faint tick of a quaint brass clock on the mantel, beside a crystal globe, could be heard. Then his long, slender hand, the hand of an artist in surgery, drew forth a blue automatic. From another drawer Forbs took a blue, seal leather case, opening it under the red glow of the Byzantine lamp; there was revealed a miniature revolver, the butt a rubber bulb. Into this the scientist poured an ounce of clear, turquoise blue liquid; as he did so a subtle, penetrating odor wafted about the room. He worked quickly, holding his head well back to escape the fumes. Then this liquid gun was placed in the case and into his coat pocket.

Three strange, unsolved disappearances within four weeks! One partially solved, . . . this fourth victim, (for both Wycks and Forbs were convinced the missing parties were victims of some devilish, ingenious and clever master mind) . . . had been found floating in the Sound. Upon the breast of the man a purple Maltese cross!

Kent Forbs rose; tall, well-poised, and donned an outer coat; then he was swinging down the hall, and on out of the Regina apartments. His goal the house of mystery on Achilles Square.

He drove his own car, speeding swiftly to a point mid-block on the square. Here he alighted to proceed directly to a paved alley which was a narrow cul-de-sac between the house he sought and a towering side-wall of a family hotel. His quick glance right and left assured him his presence in the alley was unnoticed. Ten paces down the alley he was not apt to be observed by passersby.

With utter confidence and with superb power he caught hold of the stone sill beneath a window, and drew his body upward. For a second, hanging by one arm, his left extended; with a satisfied sigh, he felt his shove on the window frame resulting in a slight, soundless movement. Cautiously, inch by inch the aperture widened, then his left knee planted against the brick, one heave of his body and he stood within a room, the window open behind him, and not a sound to convey his entry had been noted.

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● Here is a neat little scientific detective tale involving the sort of fakirs we all know about in our experience. Science must expect that unbalanced minds, absorbing unsuccessfully amazing scientific facts will turn them to crazy and absurd uses. Unfortunately some of the newer theories of Eddington, Jeans and Einstein, lead unscientific thinkers on to absurd conclusions, and often to devilish acts. This story is a case in point.

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That Forbs was alone was accounted for by the fact Wycks was, at the moment, at the morgue examining the corpse of the man bearing that purple Maltese cross upon his breast. On a basement window in this house, Wycks in his intensive ferreting of every possible clue, had detected a cross upon the dirty pane. Rough, drawn by a finger in the accumulated dirt and dust. A silent, mute plea it had seemed to him, after that floating body had been dragged from the water's edge.

Wycks would arrive soon enough. While there was still daylight Forbs had decided with that cool nerve of his, to do some investigating on his own account. That Maltese cross intrigued him, as did the motive behind these disappearances. It might be occult, it might be simple silencing of witnesses to crime, . . . but Forbs had assured Wycks of skilled cooperation, which had been gladly accepted.

This room proved unfurnished, a row of shelves, a cupboard; rather an over-sized pantry. Only one door, closed, led to the right to what the scientist figured was the kitchen, to the rear of the house.

With cat-like tread he reached the closed door. Tense, head bent forward, Forbs became conscious of voices. The speakers were in the room beyond this door and any movement of the knob would be instantly noted. Yet oak panels were no barrier to the man of science. He glanced across the room, noted the electric light cord and in a moment had attached one end of a slender wire to the cord, in his hand a flat metallic disc with miniature rubber vacuum cup; then this was attached flat to a panel of the door. Forbs placing his right ear to the metal disc, grinned grimly. The words in the other room came low and distinct.

"So you come to me for help? It is well. Ungar never fails to control the mind, the spirit. So you confess yourself a coward?"

Like the dry rattle of bones that voice, Forbs shuddered; uncanny, an echo from the graves of Egyptian dead, ages old, soulless.

"I am a coward, I want success, I crave glory, fame! Yet my very soul sickens in the time of crisis. Oh, I've

fought, . . . but I'm breaking I tell you!" a young voice, some man coming into this spider web of death, to call for mental aid. The voice went on earnestly, pleading. "You're one of these psychoanalyst sharks, or mental healers, whatever it is. Your advertisement said you could help me. Can you? Will you?"

A moment of silence, Forbs straining for the reply. A charlatan, a fakir duping an innocent victim. Pure, unadulterated humbug, . . . not worth bothering with, . . . yet there was the Maltese cross, the missing men and woman; the fourth, discovered dead.

"When these fears assail you, what form do they take? You have been an aviator, you have raced speed boats, you have taken risks not usually assumed by cowards?"

"That's just it!" cried the younger voice. "Fighting to win over myself. Crazy, daring stunt flying, racing, . . . gambling with death. Fear follows my dreams. Hellish, infernal living dreams that stay with me for days. I dream of wild mountains, caves and gigantic beasts, back to the Paleolithic age, and ugly crawling monsters, green-eyed, pursuing me. Men tall as oaks brandishing great limbs of trees shrieking, battling in bloody conflict as I seek a cave, cowering in the cold dark, naked; then I awaken, sweating, shaking, . . . my nerves shattered. Fear, dirty, yellow fear eating my heart out."

● Forbs eyes narrowed, pupils mere pin points, he was scarce breathing. The one who called himself Ungar, . . . could he analyze these dreams? Had he knowledge of the truth?

If Ungar were faking, his answer would prove it, for Forbs well knew that these dreams were proof of his own convictions as to previous existence. The life that was, and which comes back to man's mind vaguely, in the form called dreams. Imagination; but Ungar was talking:

"Once, you were living as you dream. Don't smile, Quayle; it is the fact, cold fact. The soul, or subconscious mind, as it leaves one body to inhabit another, retains some of its past experiences. Know this, Quayle, matter is made of atoms and electrons, also that the electrons revolve in diminutive orbits at amazing speeds; know, too, that some so-called matter contains infinitely more electrons and atoms per molecule than others. I have listened to the sound of these electrons as they revolve, with mad rapidity. I have counted them. But I have not gone far enough, there is still more to know, . . . more that rests within the *human brain*."

Forbs sucked in his breath, his right hand sought the gun gressing his side. Ungar had revealed an amazingly impertinent claim to knowledge of science which was all wild . . . something of the truth as to what had transpired in this mystery house was dawning upon the scientist. Shadows were deepening, Wycks might put in an appearance at any moment, . . . a contingency Forbs hoped would be delayed. Beyond this door was about to be enacted a drama beyond the flights of imagination, and eagerly Forbs awaited developments.

"Atoms, molecules, electrons, rather Greek to me, professor, or doctor, whatever you are. How does all of this affect me?" queried the man named as Quayle, a name hauntingly familiar to the man listening at the door.

"You come to me for aid, I can help you. You have intelligence, I had thought you possessed great courage. Yet now I know your background,—I can see that courage can only come to you, if you return to that prehistoric

life. Fight battles *there*, overcome forces of evil, kill beasts and emerge again today; victorious, confident, with fear and cowardice dispelled."

There was the sudden movement of a chair, the sound of moving feet as though the younger man had leaped to his feet. His voice came high pitched, incredulous, "That is sheer, damn nonsense, man!"

"Sit down!" Like a dash of ice water came the command. "I do not juggle with untruths! I know the inner mysteries of past, present, and I shall attain to the *future*." A hideous, unsettled laugh wailed through the door. Forbs shuddered. This Ungar was mad, not a living doubt; but a scholar, a scientist who tried to master mysteries far beyond Forbs himself.

"You have come to me, of your own free will. You seek my aid, . . . I have need of your willingness to cooperate," the bone dry voice was softer, sanity had returned; or was it the crafty, subtle cajoling of sinister purpose? Masking some grotesque fantasy of un-named horror?

"You can sit in that chair, at ease. I will project you into the fourth dimension, in that dimension time, space, *self* counts as nothing. While your body remains here, your sub-conscious astral will soar back over the years, the centuries, . . . back to pre-historic times. But if you are afraid, . . . if this cowardice consumes your mind, if you shrink, or rebel it will be difficult.

"Note that the chair in which you sit has straps, a head-rest. That your fear for the moment may not prove disastrous, I will secure you firmly, . . . there is no danger, . . . "the voice cracked high and cold, another cackle, "fear, . . . danger! That is what you have come to me to overcome. Listen Quayle. It will be a great adventure, thrills,—beyond your flying stunts, your mad speed boats, your roar of motors. The fourth dimension is a strange reality of nature revealed to few who have the faculty of intuition. Dimension derived from the Latin. *Dimensio*, . . . meaning to measure, then follows aspect, form, and direction.

"You and others recognize, or figure upon three known dimensions, . . . length, width, height. Some men aspire to knowledge of fourth, fifth, even sixth dimensions. Dimension may be termed beyond our puny knowledge, as soul existence. People living in and out of our own bodies, not physical but creatures unseen, unfelt, . . . other dimensions."

Forbs shifted his weight uneasily. Wycks was due. If Ungar were basing his elucidations to Quayle upon straight, honest effort to educate the man as to scientific attributes of time and space, . . . well and good. But Ungar was leading plainly to a suggested hypnosis, Forbs also knew that no necessity required the strapping of the subject in a chair. No binding, or physical restrictions, such as were to be imposed.

Another victim of the Maltese Cross?

Like a meteor across his brain flashed the thought. Behind all of this ritual of Ungar lay some sinister portent, a reflex of a scholar daring into realms barred and bordering on the criminal. Then Forbs swung swiftly, his gun levelled at the window.

Someone had placed hands upon the sill. A scraping sound, a body coming up into this room! Cursing the interruption, Forbs quickly pocketed the automatic and produced the gas gun. Any shot now would betray his presence to Ungar, foil any attempt to secure final solu-

tion of this bizarre mystery. Facing the window Forbs coolly prepared to launch a stream of the stupefying liquid into the face soon to be framed over the sill. Then his muscles and nerves relaxed; that lean, virile face, that pair of eyes belonged to Wycks, who was about to call out, when Forbs gestured for silence.

● Like a cat, Wycks dropped across the sill. Silently he bent his head so the scientist could breath into his ear. "Hell's popping in that room; my own dictagraph, I've listened in. We can't both hear, but stand by,—a break may come any instant. Don't interrupt."

Wycks, subduing his evident curiosity, nodded as Forbs resumed his listening attitude, ear pressed to that delicate instrument of sound. Only a few moments had elapsed, . . . what had transpired, or been said in the interim in the other room, the scientist could not know. For a moment he stood quiet, a puzzled frown puckering his forehead. The voices beyond the panel had ceased.

"No!" it was Quayle shouting vehemently. "I'll not do it. Maybe I *am* a dirty, yellow coward, but if my body does stay here, if my mind goes flying out into the unknown, how do I know I'll come back? My soul; that means my life. I'm not up to it, Ungar. Keep away from me. I won't, . . . back I say . . . oh—"

A muffled groan, utter agony, then one bone-rattle laugh, mirthless, soul shivering. Wyck's took a step forward; that groan, and the dull, heavy thud of a falling body had carried even to his ears.

"Good Lord! Forbs, we've got to get in there," Wycks muttered.

"I was afraid the young fool would fall victim to Ungar. But quiet, Ungar hasn't killed his man yet, . . . I'm sure of that. This is a brain test, and my idea's to see what's going on in there. Ungar will be too busy to notice our entry through the basement. Get out of that window, Wycks, hurry. We have a slight margin of time, all too slight, perhaps."

Forbs' decisive manner sped Wycks to action. In another minute the men were down in the alley, with heavy shadows about them. The sun had dropped out of sight, yet Forbs had asked no questions as to the investigator's trip to the morgue. That could wait. With common assent and unity they darted to a basement window, directly under the room in which Quayle and Ungar had been conversing. Black smudge and bits of coal marked this as the furnace room window. When the window was pried open they edged themselves in to land on a pile of soft coal. Despite precautions the coal slid about under their feet, there was more noise than either desired, yet when they reached the clear floor, no indication came that their entry was detected.

"Ugh! What a stench," muttered Wycks, his body a ghostly shadow in the gloom. Sickening, fetid, . . . an odor of decayed flesh. A cold blast of air swept sickeningly across Forbs' face. Objects loomed from the corners, fantastic shapes, while a sudden tapping came from above their heads.

"This is a beastly hole, we've got to find the stairs, come on, Wycks. Dark as a dungeon, how about a pocket lamp, I didn't bring one?"

"Righto," then the ribbon of yellow ate across the floor.

"Great Heavens! Look, that's blood; yonder an open pit. Flash your light over this way. Merciful father! . . . Wycks. What a sight! Come on, I'm getting dizzy."

Forbs was pivoting for the stairs in the corner as Wycks held one horrified second, staring down into the horrible pit.

The stench almost overpowering him. Ghoulish faces, whether man or woman, half covered with a filthy scum stared up at him, flesh corroded, falling from bones by action of the acid, the pickling liquid of the pit.

"There's an answer to where some of the victims disappeared," snapped Wycks savagely.

Forbs, at the foot of the dark wooden stairs, halted abruptly. The cellar was humming, about his ears was a drone as of gigantic bees. Wycks flashed his light about, darting rays up among festoons of cobwebs, then across that pit of death. Still the amazing sound engulfed them, zipping, spitting sounds, the smell of sulphur.

Shouting above the strange noise, Forbs went up the stairs on the jump, Wycks at his heels. A cellar of ominous portent, gloomy, evil smelling, to haunt their every dream.

"Come on." Forbs kicked open the door, found himself in a narrow areaway and swung to the right. Unerringly he had located the kitchen, but when he flung his body against the oaken barrier, it refused to yield. Together Wycks and Forbs stood back then plummeted bodily; at the impact of their shoulders the bolt snapped.

From within the room rang a wild cry. Like a trapped tiger, beside a huge wooden chair, in which was bound a helpless form, crouched Ungar, swarthy, hatchet face contorted into a murderous, maniac snarl.

"Get out . . . who are you? Get out, I say!"

Forbs ducked as a great crystal jar sailed directly at his head. Wycks, uttering a cry of warning drew his revolver; the mad scientist had reached for a repeating rifle resting in the corner. It was Forbs who launched out to dive under the weapon; a terrific uppercut landing on Ungar's chin. With a grunt the man went backward, sagged and toppled to the floor.

"Quick, for Heaven's sake, Wycks! There by your arm. That switch,—good!" as the investigator yanked down the black lever. The vibrant hum that had assailed their ears died out.

"Here, help me unstrap Quayle. He's breathing, thank God," said Forbs. The man lay back a choking leather thong about his neck, both wrists were encircled with copper bands, his ankles stripped of shoes and socks—as had been the body of the drowned man in the Sound—were similarly encased.

Running from the center of the chair, in the back, a pair of heavy, insulated cables connected with a square black box upon the wall. An ebony lever protruded from the upper section of this box. Upon Quayle's head, which had been shaved to the skull, rested a cap, formed of grayish metal composition, unknown to Forbs. Across this cap, where it met Quayle's forehead was a long, numbered strip of brass, much like the scale upon a radio; a red arrow indicating the scale numerals.

"This hellish contraption looks to me like the electric chair, at the big house," muttered Wycks, wonderingly.

"I have not quite fathomed the matter," retorted Forbs, studying the wire connections with interest. "Although I have a rather clear conception as to what lies behind the entire mystery. Ungar might fly off at *any* tangent. I venture an examination of the bodies in the death pit, will reveal each victim with a shaved cranium. This man Ungar was ranting about the fourth dimension, a long

dead past, and a positive future life, of souls, and thought transference. Quayle came here to find a method of conquering cowardice. I should say if this experience has not frightened the very life and soul out of the man, he need never worry about cowardice again."

"Quayle?" repeated Wycks slowly; his nod came emphatic. "Now I know; he is Hy Quayle, dare devil racer, speed boats, autos, airships, . . . I've seen his picture in the tabloids often. A coward? I'd never have thought it. But here's another mystery, Forbs. The man in the morgue has a shaved skull, his ankles and wrists burned black. I wondered at those strange, charred circles."

Forbs nodded silently, busy endeavoring to force a drink between Quayle's ashen lips, but the eyelids never fluttered, the lips remained a tight, unyielding line. The scientist rose, a grim twist to his lips, then he reversed the electrodes, manipulated the switch and to Wycks' wondering amazement, Quayle jerked to instant consciousness. Utterly dazed, shaking his head, his eyes focussed upon Ungar crumpled in the corner. His face contorted to black hate.

"Curse you, you beast! Just a murdering fakir, . . . the prehistoric age, me going back through the centuries to conquer my fears, to drive away my dreams. Bah! You wanted to steal my brain, my stunt courage,—to use it for yourself. You tried to transfer my mind to *yours*, . . . but it didn't work!"

"Calm yourself, Quayle. You have hit upon much of the truth, but would you mind explaining matters? Exactly what transpired in here? I know he strapped you in the chair, upon your refusal to continue the experiments. I know he clugged you, but please make the whole affair more definite," Forbs spoke quietly, facing Quayle.

"You know what went on in here?" Quayle betrayed his astonishment. "The rat claimed we were alone in the house. He had to land on me with a mallet to strap me in this blasted trap. He said he intended to explore my brain, turn my talents into his own mind. Ungar, the fakir. He is a lunatic, isn't he?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Forbs seriously. "At one time a keen student, a scholar, a dreamer perhaps, delving into the realm of atoms, molecules, dimensions—striving to achieve the greater dimensions of the mind in a world beyond. In his explorations into the realm of mind, his own brain snapped. Grim tragedy, but the truth. You spoke of some advertisement. What was that?"

"I noted a small card in the *Times*, a blind address.

Like a fool, I answered it. It offered mental science as cure for nerves, for fear. Of late I've had horrible dreams, broken sleep and my nerves were shot. But it does not come from any former life; I'm sold on that. A regular doctor looking after my liver is what I need, not a cracked brain specialist."

Forbs and the investigator smiled. Quayle returning to his usual self, and stating an obvious fact. Wycks having learned Quayle's story, turned to tracing back on facts applying to the other victims of Ungar. Summoning the coroner he assigned to him the unpleasant duty of handling the semi-destroyed bodies in the death pit. Here the coroner made a startling, gruesome discovery. The vat of quick lime failed as a solvent, as it had not been properly slacked, the bodies were but half consumed. Ungar in his unbalanced state of mind, had failed to take into account a drain pipe that discharged into the pit, thoroughly diluting the contents. So diluted the bodies were in a most horrible condition.

Forbs, upon investigating, after a thorough fumigation of the cellar, found two large dynamos beneath the cellar stairs, these had created the strange hum, as Ungar had switched on the current as they were about to ascend to the kitchen.

That same evening Wycks faced Forbs in the latter's apartment. "What's your idea as to the Maltese Cross on the breast of each victim?"

"That?" Forbs smoked thoughtfully for a moment. "I happen to know Ungar belonged to several foreign medical and scientific societies. The Maltese Cross is an honor emblem for one of the foremost, highly thought of societies in Munich. My deduction is that Ungar had won this cross honorably, before his mind turned to murder. In his insane orgy of thought and brain transference, he stamped each of his victims as an emblem of honor, that is, he heated the medal, and branded the body to mark a martyr in the cause of science."

Wycks nodded. "I understand; but when down in that cellar I investigated a bit. The window upon which he had traced the cross was but a few feet from the death pit. Ungar had traced that cross in the grime on the glass, after dropping a victim in the pit. Stamped in his brain, as upon the body, it was actual thought transference, subconscious, true, but leading us to a timely solution of a very baffling case. A queer twist of Justice, at that."

THE END