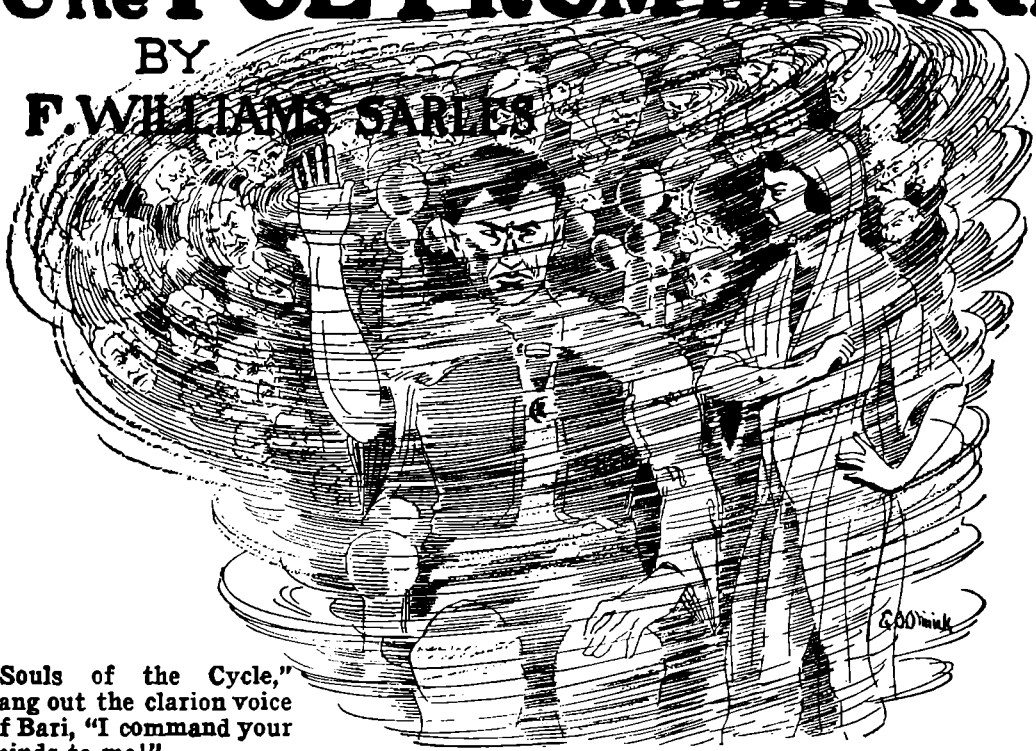


The Foe From Beyond

BY
F. WILLIAMS SARLES



"Souls of the Cycle,"
rang out the clarion voice
of Bari, "I command your
minds to me!"

MAJESTIC columns on every side, rising in grandeur until their tops were lost in the infinity of space. Forests of them, gleaming with ineffable splendor, enclosing at their gigantic bases a coliseum, completely surrounding a platform supported by alternate black and white pillars, seven of them to every side of a pentagon.

From the platform, tier upon tier of encircling steps radiated back to the columns, which, from this place in the center, seemed hazy in the immeasurable distance.

On the platform was a splendid throne. Intricate in its designs, delicate in the tracery of mystic symbols which covered every surface, it could not be said to have any definite color, for it constantly changed its hue, as though lights of sublime beauty were suffusing it. At no time did it seem real.

Over the whole was an atmosphere

of unreality, an ethereal tone, as though this mighty temple were a thing of ephemeral, fairylike beauty and quality, to vanish at a breath.

A breath? It would vanish at a thought, for this tremendous structure had been created by thought, the only reality in the Second Cycle.

At this particular pin-point of time in the eternity of the Cycle, some event of moment was about to take place. The vast theater suddenly became misty, half-sounds whispered through its immensity. Vague shadows seemed to flit about, to become half real at times, only to slip back into nothingness. After a short while all this ceased. There was a moment of deathlike silence, as if the very condition of being were held suspended. Then—tier upon tier of the steps held white, robed figures, each with eyes fixed on the throne in the center.

The Thought Council had con-

vened, that august body which through Bari guides the course of the Second Cycle.

The Second Cycle! Abode of the Dead!

Ever since the day Paul Duval discovered the ray which separates the soul from the body, I had been caught in a whirl of events, the like of which has never before been the experience of any man. Even now, I find it hard to believe that it was I, Harry Chaptel, who witnessed and took part in these scenes, or that it was a mere human like Paul Duval who brought them to pass.

Some of you have read my previous accounts of Duval's weird experiment, and of how Duval and I entered the realm of Tasmari, Queen of the Vortex. But for those who have not, I shall briefly sketch what happened.

Paul Duval had begun with the theory that since matter and energy are indestructible, so, too, must be that force which is neither. Some call it the Soul, others the Intelligence. He held that since it was "Intelligence," it must of its own nature remain an entity even after it had left the body.

To reason thus was one thing, to prove it another. If his reasoning were accurate, he thought it likely the entity released from the body was of some fluidic matter, too tenuous to reflect the sun's light, hence invisible. Since the eyes are capable of registering but a small fraction of the total sun's rays, to make his "spirits" visible, he set out to fashion an apparatus which would make all the rays visible to the eyes, and hence, by reflection, bring the departed soul to the sight of man.

The result of his work was the ray and the screen against which it was projected. The joint action of the two made any spirit body, interposed between the screen and the projectors of the ray, visible.

Yes, Duval succeeded in his quest, but often have I wished he had failed. At any rate, the ray proved the truth of his deduction, and it soon showed itself possessed of other powers on which he had not reckoned.

One night a woman's form came into the beam of the ray. At sight of her Duval's lips parted in a wondering cry.

"Marguerite," he murmured, and I knew the shade for the soul of the only woman Paul had ever loved, and to whose memory he remained faithful, though she had died years before.

She held out her arms to him. He entered the ray and fell to the floor as he kissed her. Then his spirit rose from the inert body and went away with the woman, leaving his body alive, yet dead, in the ray-flood. I say "alive yet dead" advisedly, for though it could maintain life if fed, the brain housed no thoughts, no will guided the aimless motions of the body. Intelligence, or if you wish, the soul, had fled. Do not tell me the "soul" and "life" are identical. Duval's body, after the Intelligence had gone, was only a shell. That body, had no more soul than a jelly-fish, though, as in a jelly-fish, the spark of life was present.

Thus was the discovery made that the ray could separate the soul from the body, leaving the body a fit habitation for the soul's return. Not like death, which leaves the machine so damaged the life-force can not animate the body.

It was five years before I heard again from Duval. Then his voice came to me over the radio, ordering me to recondition the apparatus for making the ray. I did so.

Having accomplished a projection, I was myself hurled into the Second Cycle, being hypnotized by the eyes of a figure which the ray partially materialized, into entering the ray. At one moment I was safe in the laboratory. The next, and I was looking

into the room from the reverse side of the screen, which appeared to me as a doorway leading back. But to enter that door again was not allowed to me until much had happened.

The Second Cycle is a realm of thought. It is the empire of souls departed from life, co-existent with the material world, a part and yet not a part of the universe. Thought is the only reality, the only force, the only material, there. It is another dimension, the second cycle of the spirit's progress toward something beyond,—perhaps perfection.

Bari rules it by the power of thought. Each soul on entering must give over to Bari's control that part of its being we know as the subconscious. The part we know as the conscious will is retained. But Bari has a Thought Council, faithful to him, as you shall see, which he controls by the massed force of the subconscious wills in the Cycle, even as the Council governs the massed wills by the power of suggestion. Bari controls the thought flow from either direction.

Hating Marguerite for luring Duval into the ray, I soon had cause to love her as greatly as I had hated. Without her, we should still be in the power of Bari and Tasmari.

I found Duval set apart in the Cycle. By the power of thought an insulation known as an "isolation barrier," seemingly composed of some clear, strange, amberlike substance, had been thrown about him. It held him motionless and prevented his thoughts from going out, or thoughts of others from reaching him. Alone I could not have freed him. But Marguerite showed me the way. Concentrating my thought on the barrier itself, I had broken it down, though by some odd force, I was nearly drawn into it beside Duval.

Duval told me he had incurred Bari's enmity because he dared to desire to return to the Life Side and rejoin his body. Bari feared for his

power if the souls on the Life Side became acquainted with the fact they must yield their subconsciousness on entering the Cycle. If enough refused this, Bari's rule would end.

The one thing feared by the souls in the Cycle was the Vortex. What it was none knew. Some thought it was the end of the soul cast therein, that it was the "death of the soul;" others that it was the entrance to a next state of existence, which all believed they would attain. Some thought it meant annihilation. None knew what it was save that a soul cast into it never was seen again in the Cycle. None understood it; therefore all feared it. Tasmari, sister of Bari, was queen over it.

Duval and I had nearly won through to the screen to rejoin our bodies, when it was discovered Paul had been freed from his isolation barrier. Instantly the thought forces of the Cycle were brought into play by Bari, drawing us hurtling back to the Cycle, to a mighty colonnaded temple. Here mighty Bari pronounced his decrees, surrounded in state by the members of his Thought Council, whose power through Bari enforced his commands.

We were tried, after a fashion, and because Paul had given control of his subjective will to the Cycle on entering, Bari had the power over him. I had not done so, and on my promise never to divulge the secrets of the Cycle, was given permission to return to my body. Duval was sentenced to the Vortex.

Bidden to see the end, I had watched Paul poised on the brink of the abyss which contained the Vortex.

It was then Marguerite defied Bari and his Council. She interposed her will between Paul and Bari, though she knew it might mean her destruction.

She gave us time to enter the ray and fight our way into our bodies. We had seen Bari bend his awful

power on her, and had seen her stand fast. But, she could not but wilt under it. Indeed we knew she had been broken, for as we gained our bodies, we felt the pull of the Cycle on us—too late.

We could only hope an easy fate had been hers—and Duval was broken-hearted. He worked night and day to free her through the ray, but—

Thus matters stood at the time described at the opening of this narrative. I am giving the details as accurately as I may, not having been a witness to what happened. It was told me later by no less a person than Tasmari,—but that is another tale. Other incidents in what I am about to relate were also told to me by others, except the last act, in which I was one of the players.

MOMENT after moment passed after the white-robed figures appeared, and still the throne remained untenanted. Finally a shadow flitted across it and the vaguest suggestion of a form appeared there. It flickered out; rapidly grew in intensity once more, until—on the seat of majesty a male figure appeared.

Noble in his proportions; splendid in the anger which gathered on his brow; beautiful in the physical; he dominated the vast gathering with an impression of boundless power, of which he seemed to be the essence. And he was power, for Bari controlled the subjective wills of countless souls.

He held up his hand for silence. A sigh of expectancy swept through the assemblage, dying away as the audience leaned forward the better to hear.

Bari looked over the throng with a searching gaze.

“Where is Tasmari, my sister?” he asked. There was no response.

“’Tis as I thought,” he cried wrathfully at last, when no one an-

swered. “Since Tasmari is not here, it is not difficult to say why. She fears to come. Her own guilt shall accuse her.”

“Bari was long in appearing,” said a figure on the foremost row.

“Yea! That I was. Tasmari tried to prevent the convening of the Council. Tried to prevent me, Bari, from appearing before you. Did you feel a counter-thought to my call?”

“Yes! yes!” came from many. “A thought which cried us away from the temple impinged on our wills, O mighty Bari.”

“And I, to whom all by our system should yield obedience, found myself scarce able to reach the throne.” He smiled coldly. “My sister’s power grows apace.” Then savagely, “She could not oppose me thus were all my Council loyal. But mark me, I shall root out every disloyal member.”

A shudder of uneasiness swayed through the multitude.

“Come! Let us have it now. Shall Bari or Tasmari rule?”

“Bari! Bari!” came the answer, though faintly the outer tiers seemed to cry “Tasmari.”

Bari smiled in triumph.

“I shall shortly put your loyalty to a test,” he stated. “A situation has risen which may disrupt the Cycle and usher in the ancient chaos, when there was no head nor government to the Cycle, and soul met soul in strife. To take measures against this, I have summoned you.”

Bari ceased speaking for a moment. As he did so a sort of haze seemed to gather about him and his head drooped. For a second only, however, and he began to speak again.

“You well know Paul Duval and Harry Chaptel who came to our Cycle, leaving living bodies behind them, have returned to those bodies, though I opposed them. You also know that Marguerite, who dared set her will against mine to give them time to escape, hangs a deadened soul

in an isolation barrier erected about her by our thought. But you do not know these two plan a return to our Cycle carrying with them the seeds of rebellion. You do not know this would never have been but for Tasmari."

Bari spat out the name as though hurling something venomous from his lips. Again as he stopped speaking the haze gathered about him, this time heavier, and did not entirely dissipate when he resumed speech.

"Tasmari knows I would bring a charge against her. Do you wonder she opposed this gathering?"

A tense silence fell on the host, broken at length by a voice which called, "In what has she erred?"

"She erred in bringing Chaptel to the Cycle."

"What error there?"

"She failed to require the usual control, and therefore failed in her duty. She also——"

"Is she to be charged without the chance to defend herself?" enquired one.

"She deserves no hear——"

Bari's voice was drowned by cries of "let her appear," "she is too high to be condemned like an ordinary soul—she is one of us."

Bari's face darkened in anger, but as the cries continued he motioned his arm in wrathful assent.

"You shall rue the day you crossed Bari," he shouted. "But now—— Tasmari! Tasmari! I, Bari, in my own right and in the name of the Council command you to appear. Let this thought seek you out wherever you may be; in the realm of the clean or in the place of the evil ones, yea, let it break down even your own powerful barrier of thought. Tasmari, you are commanded. Come!"

At the last word the haze dropped like a mantle about him. The figures on the seats swayed like reeds tossed by the blast of a hurricane. Only in

the center and near the throne was there calm. On these seats the gathered souls were rigid in concentrated thought, their eyes boring into the now whirling mist on the platform.

In that mist two powerful wills struggled; thoughts strong as cosmic force lashed at each other, soundless and terrible in their strife. At times it seemed as though two figures, motionless as death, showed through it, then one, and sometimes the mist darkened like a lowering nimbus cloud. Only once was there a sound. From the haze came the clarion voice of Bari calling. "Souls of the Cycle, I command your minds to me!"

Instantly, among the seats, more and more souls sank into the dead calm of concentration. Faster and faster their numbers increased until all except the farthest tiers were gazing steadfastly at the mist.

Suddenly it was over. The cloud lifted and Bari stood forth. With him was Tasmari, beaten but defiant.

"So Tasmari would take my place?" he muttered through clenched teeth. "You would add insubordination to your other failings? You forgot Bari controls the minds of the Cycle, my sister." To the concourse he shouted in a ringing voice, in which there was a hint of mockery, "Tasmari has come to defend herself!"

Something like a sob went through the concourse, except those who had first stood true to Bari. Then there was silence, with the eyes of all on Tasmari.

"We shall leave aside this attempt to overthrow your lawful ruler, for that is something which concerns us," this last significantly. "You were summoned to answer a more serious charge. Are you ready?"

"I am ready to meet any charge you may bring against me, my brother," she answered proudly. "What false accusation do you make now?"

"Nothing false. I charge you with the responsibility of the imminent invasion of our sacred Cycle, by forces from the Life Side, led by Paul Duval and Harry Chaptel."

"How am I responsible for that?"

Bari bent his eyes sternly on her.

"You brought Chaptel over here," he asserted.

"That does not make me responsible."

"No? Had he not come in, Duval would never have been freed from his isolation barrier. That is true, is it not?"

"Yes," she replied defiantly, "and had you not blundered in giving Marguerite the power of one of the Council, she could not have helped Chaptel, and all would be well."

"That could not be foreseen at the time the power was granted, and it does not mitigate your fault. The guilt is yours, Tasmari. You hated Marguerite, and you sought to embarrass her by bringing Harry Chaptel to this side, because you thought he also hated her. You were wrong. You exceeded your authority. Duval would still be in isolation had not Chaptel freed him. You admit that?"

"Yes," she conceded.

"No need to argue further. My charge is substantiated. With his release the danger commenced. The guilt is yours, and through you the evil which threatens us must be removed." His lips parted grimly. "If you know of no way, Bari will tell you."

"You are ever the fool, my brother," she stated simply. "With all you have said true," she went on, heeding not his angry glance, "we have nothing to fear. Do you not hold Marguerite?"

"What of that?"

"I said you were a fool. With her as hostage, do you think Harry and Paul will dare to move against us?

Better isolation than the Vortex," she added with meaning.

"How do they know she is not in the Vortex, instead of isolation?"

"We can let them know through the instrument called the 'radio' by which Paul asked help of Harry. I have spoken through it, and know how."

Bari bent a grudging look of admiration on her.

"It may do. We shall see. Until we do you are not a free soul nor Queen of the Vortex, and besides, do not forget Bari demands satisfaction for what you tried to do to him."

"At your own time, my brother," she replied.

AT THE mention of Marguerite's name, a figure which had appeared quietly in the Temple came to the foot of the throne platform. He had waited in silence while Bari and Tasmari wrangled. As the latter turned haughtily, and half-triumphantly, away from Bari, her eyes fell on him. At the sight she started as though stung.

"What brings you here, Ratrim," she demanded quickly.

"Ill news for you and the Cycle, I fear," he answered. Tasmari's face, at these words, showed fear for the first time since she had appeared. Bari stepped forward, enquiry written on his face.

"Speak!" ordered Tasmari faintly.

"Who is this?" queried Bari.

"The guard over Marguerite's isolation," answered Ratrim for himself.

"What do you want?"

"I have a report to make."

"What is it?"

"As I watched at the barrier, a strange light seemed to play on it. The barrier began to disappear. I bent my will upon it, bidding it stay, still it melted. I called to the Council, but none answered. Then——"

“Then——?” exclaimed Bari and Tasmari together.

“Then it faded away and in an instant Marguerite had disappeared.”

Bari turned slowly on Tasmari, who threw her arm before her face as though to shield her eyes from some horror.

“You see, my sister, what you now have to answer for,” he muttered in a low tense voice. “While you would seize my power, Paul Duval, in some manner, broke Marguerite’s barrier. It could be none other than he. Our guard’s timely call which would have summoned us to his aid went unheeded because the Council poured their thought on me, to overcome your rebellion. Have you something to offer? Some scheme left in your fertile thoughts to regain the captive?”

She did not answer.

“Then it shall be my way. And you, Tasmari, one-time Queen of the Vortex, shall be the instrument to bring us victory.”

“How may I do it?” fearsomely.

“This way,” solemnly: “Duval has a friend, Carac. Carac is often with Duval and Harry, and they are about to let him know the results of their adventure here. He can approach them without suspicion. Now, if his body housed another soul—yours for instance, my sister—Carac might kill his friends, sending their souls into the Cycle, where Bari will deal with them this time.”

“You mean—I must drive out his soul with myself? Taint my spirit body with the touch of flesh? That is too horrible.”

“Either that or the Vortex for you,” with grim finality. “Do you accept the task?”

Shaken to the depth of her spirit-soul, Tasmari hesitated. But fear of the unknown won over horror of the known.

“I accept,” she agreed with a sigh.

THE sick man stirred uneasily in a restless sleep. He had lain thus since early evening. At times he would spring bolt-upright in his bed, then sink back, muttering in his strange delirium. There had been intervals when the combined efforts of both nurse and physician had hardly sufficed to prevent him from leaping into the room.

The disease which was tearing the life from Carac, the great physicist, was not ordinary. Fever, which usually accompanies delirium, was not present. The face was not flushed, the breathing not unusual. The only symptom of sickness could be found in the beating of his heart, which alternately raced like an overspeeded motor and slowed to where the stethoscope could scarcely detect its feeble pulsations.

Clearly, the cardio-vascular specialist in charge of the case was baffled. The usual restoratives and stimulants seemed to have virtually no effect. The periods when the heart beat wildly were becoming fewer, those when the beats faded away, more prolonged. With the gaining of the slow over the fast, the periods of Carac’s wild delirium, or terror, became more frequent, though weaker.

“If this keeps up much longer we’ll have a dead man on our hands before morning,” remarked the specialist, finally.

The nurse was silent. She knew that if anyone on earth could save Carac, it was the man who was attending him.

They continued watching their patient in silence. Outside, a clock in a steeple, which struck the quarter-hours, sent its silvery message to the sleeping city.

“Half past 3,” muttered the doctor to himself.

The silent watch continued. The nurse busied herself about the room,

once in a while stopping to ease the invalid's position on his pillow, or busying herself with a hypodermic on the table by the bed. Outside, a dog set up a doleful howling. This continued for a time, then a window slammed open, there was a thud and a tinkle of glass breaking and the howling ceased.

The clock struck again.

"Quarter of 4," said the doctor.

The nurse came up behind him and laid her hand softly on his shoulder. As he turned his face up to her, she motioned him to silence. With her eyes she cautiously indicated the figure on the bed.

The doctor carefully turned and could scarcely restrain a start of surprise. Carac was stealthily watching him out of half-narrowed eyes. It was not this alone which had made the doctor start, however. As his eyes had met those of the patient, he had a momentary glimpse into the soul of the inferno. In those eyes were, strangely, horror and hate triumphant.

The expression passed in a moment. A little sheepishly the doctor leaned forward and gently patted Carac on the shoulder.

"Better, old man?" But Carac closed his eyes and the muttering began once more.

The doctor turned to find the nurse looking at him questioningly. He shook his head and they took up their vigil once more; this time a bit more on the alert. Somehow, both felt a new tension had entered in; a pre-science of something to occur.

The clock was striking again.

One—two—three—four.

"Four o——" began the doctor, but his sentence was never finished. With a soul-paralyzing screech, Carac had launched himself from his bed. The doctor and the nurse darted toward him, but he shook the former off and dealt the woman a blow which

sent her reeling, half-stunned, across the room.

With a curse the doctor again threw himself toward Carac,—then stopped in mid-rush. The sick man was standing at his full height, not violent now; head thrown back, every lineament of his face expressing untold agony and stark fear. Cry after cry burst from his twisted lips.

"You can't! you can't! you can't!" he screamed. His face became black and the sound came in half-strangled syllables from his throat.

Suddenly he wilted.

"All right! I'll go," he sobbed, and plunged face downward to the floor.

The doctor leaped to his side and turned him over on his back. The man slowly opened his eyes. They held the light of sanity, but glowed with a strange light, an inhuman quality.

"All right now, old man?" asked the specialist.

"Yes," huskily, and Carac closed his eyes and seemed to sleep. But in those eyes the doctor had half-sensed a subtle difference,—as though a new personality had entered, utterly unlike Carac.

3

IT WAS a terrible night of storm. A night of moon and rain with the wind driving the harrassed clouds scurrying before it. Lightning flashed, jagged forks of it across the sky, and the thunder's answering growl had in it the quality of sound which made it seem a personal thing, a thing of menace.

With but one light turned on, Duval and I sat smoking silently, each busied with his own thoughts. The silence within was enhanced by the din without. Though it was warm in the room, I shivered slightly and noticed that Duval, one hand in his pocket, was slouched down in the up-

holstery of his chair, as though he, too, felt the dankness.

My reverie was broken with a start. A low noise, like the beat of powerful wings, and a white ghost sailed into the study from the room beyond. I jumped half out of my chair, then sank back with a foolish half-laugh as I realized what had occasioned the disturbance.

A great white owl had flitted through the room and was now perched on the arm of Duval's chair. Duval always did the unusual, but one seldom chooses a fierce bird of prey as a household pet.

When I had surprized Duval a few nights back carrying the inert bird from in front of the ray machine, I had merely thought him engaged in some experiment. Since coming back from the Second Cycle, where the ray had sped us, he had occasionally used the machine, and against my protest. I did not like the idea of his opening the door to the Other Side. I could remember Tasmari's last words too plainly: "You win this time, but at the last you must return." I knew the returning would cause us some worry, and I was not eager to have it happen until we were prepared to defend ourselves.

Duval had tamed this owl to a certainty. After a moment's rest on the chair arm, it snuggled up to him and placed its head on his shoulder. He began to stroke the feathers under its throat, talking to it the while in a crooning voice.

The bird acted so humanly that I laughed, and then more loudly. It was too ludicrous to see the staid Duval and the sedate bird acting like two in love. At my laugh Duval drew his hand away for all the world like a little boy caught stealing jam, and the bird took its head from off his shoulder with a shy prettiness, laughably like a young girl caught in the act of caressing her sweetheart.

"What's so funny?" growled Duval.

"You and that bird," I replied. "Like two sweethearts."

Duval looked at me quizzically, but merely grunted in answer. I am not slow in putting two and two together and his expression should have told me something. It didn't—until later.

No more was said, for it was then that Carac came. He stood suddenly framed in the doorway. Whether he had just walked in, or had been admitted by Duval's man, we did not know. But there he was.

Coinciding exactly with his appearance, a black cloud shaped strangely like a man in flowing robes flung itself over the face of the moon, which, up to now, in spite of the storm, had miraculously kept her countenance clear. The room grew darker, and from that moment until Carac's mission was finished, I felt the presence of something malignant in the room.

Only that day, we had heard Carac was desperately ill, so we were naturally surprized to see him up and about, especially in a night like the present. A fine fellow, Carac, and one of our best friends.

"Well, come in, old man," called Duval, who was the first to recover from his surprize. "Thought you were on your back."

Carac came forward, somewhat uncertainly, and took Duval's outstretched hand. I extended mine. As I caught his fingers they were cold and clammy, like a dead man's, or a dead fish. His face, too, was colorless with the pallor of death. I let go his hand, which fell numbly to his side as though the effort of shaking hands had completely exhausted him.

Without a word, he walked gropingly toward a chair, stumbled over a rug and would have fallen, had not Paul caught him by the arm.

"By Jove! Carac! You are weak.

Why did you want to come out on a night like this?"

"Wanted to talk with you." These, the first words he had uttered, were thick, as though he had not the full control of the functions of his tongue.

"Couldn't wait, eh?" smiled Duval.

"Yes—er—no. Couldn't wait," he repeated, parrot-fashion.

"What is it about?" I asked.

He did not answer, but turned his eyes full into mine. I tried to meet his gaze, but somehow couldn't. There was a remarkable brilliancy, and a sort of stare in those eyes; behind that something else—something—something—I can not explain what it was save that it made me shiver to look at them.

When I looked down he turned his face to Duval, who returned the stare for a moment, but also looked away, laughing a little uneasily as he did so.

The silence was becoming embarrassing. Paul, who was not seated, took a cigar from the humidor, and bit off the end with a savage little twist. He struck a match and touched it to the end of his smoke.

Carac also helped himself to a cigar. Odd that I should have noticed it so clearly at the time, but Carac had never (and I knew him well) smoked cigars, preferring the cigarette. He, too, struck a match, carrying it shakily toward his face. It went out before a light could be secured, and he let the charred stick fall to his feet.

Duval absent-mindedly stooped to pick it up. In doing so, he half bent one knee, which kept his body nearly erect. His neck came on the level with Carac's hands.

From weakly hanging fingers, these were suddenly transformed into clutching talons. Carac's whole body tensed to spring, as those

hands seemed to dart for Duval's throat.

With a startled exclamation, Duval eluded them by falling backward. I jumped to my feet, but Carac had sunk back into his chair, an apologetic, if sickly grin on his face.

Duval said nothing, but a thoughtful expression came into his face. Walking over to me he whispered, "I think he's delirious. Probably escaped from his nurses. I am going to call his home."

He was half-way across the room when Carac called.

"Don't go out. I feel better now, and I have something to tell you. Don't feel so strong and want to get back to bed." Duval hesitated but returned.

"I had a dream," he began. "In it I saw you and Chaptel here. I saw you in front of a machine of some kind which was projecting a powerful beam of strangely colored light. I saw your bodies fall to the floor of the room you were in, and your souls leaped free from their bondage of flesh."

Duval and I turned startled faces to each other. A dream? Except that we had not entered the Cycle together it was a fact. Carac continued as though not noticing our actions.

"Next, I saw you in a place strange to you. You were separated. Paul was enclosed in a strange-appearing substance, motionless. Harry was standing near. With him a woman. She was talking to him. Presently he fixes his eyes upon Paul. They become staring and concentrated. He slowly approaches you. You lift your hand. It drops by your side again. Harry is entering your prison. Then the woman fixes her eyes on you, Harry. In a moment you are both free and the woman has gone."

We were amazed. The man was recalling exactly the incident where I freed Paul from his isolation barrier while we were in the **Second Cycle**.

How could anyone on this side know of that? We had told no one. I looked questioningly at Paul, and saw a light of half-understanding in his face.

Carac continued: "Then I saw a mighty temple——"

"Stop," shouted Paul. "Do you mean to tell me you dreamed that?"

A peculiar smile twisted Carac's features, and he answered evasively, "That is not all the dream. There is more. When I next saw you——"

"That's enough, Carac," said Duval. "Harry and I know the rest. You could not know it unless—— unless——"

Carac rose to his feet. "Just a dream," he smoothly interrupted.

Then his manner changed. It became more hard, less the attitude of a sick man.

"A few days ago you started an experiment to discover if, indeed, the soul did exist after death. I warn you to stop. To forget all you know about it, and to tell no one of what you learned. In this way only can you earn safety."

"A few days ago!" we cried in unison. Carac looked at us sharply, but did not reply.

"Why, that was five years ago," came from Duval.

Carac ran his hand over his face as though brushing something from his eyes. "Ah! I had forgotten Time exists here," he breathed in a voice so low I could not be sure what he said. Then aloud in stern demand, "Nonetheless, I command you to stop, in the name of——"

His voice died out in the middle of his sentence.

The white owl, which had sat as motionless as though stuffed in one corner of the room, had hooted dismally, and half flying, half hopping, came to rest beside Duval.

Carac had at first been startled, and now appeared half angry, as he saw what had made the noise. Suddenly

a new expression came over his face, one of surprize, changing to understanding.

He glanced sardonically at Duval, then crouched and slowly, like a panther stalking its prey, crept toward the bird.

Duval and I, too astounded at the suddenness and unreality of it all for words, watched him, fascinated. The bird, as Carac approached, edged away from him, fear in its eyes, human fear. Merciful heavens! The eyes were those of a frightened girl!

Just in time Duval struck aside the arm which was shooting cobra-like at the owl. Instantly, Carac turned on him.

"Where did you get—that?" he asked in a tense voice.

"I——"

"No need to tell me, Duval—I know." He swayed toward Paul, deadly menace in every movement. But Duval did not stir. He was looking at Carac's face, which seemed subtly changed. It was the same face, yet somehow different. The eyes!—the eyes!—"windows of the soul" in truth.

"My God!" gasped Paul. "And I—know—you—Tasmari!"

Carac halted an instant, body tensed.

Now the explanation of things flashed upon me. Carac's uncertainty of motion because Tasmari could not control the muscles perfectly. Cigars instead of cigarettes because Tasmari did not know what Carac smoked. "A few days ago" instead of five years because Time did not exist in the Cycle and Tasmari would naturally not measure it on the Life Side. No wonder the face had suddenly become familiar to me—it was Tasmari looking out at us through Carac's eyes. Tasmari had driven out Carac's soul.

AT THE word "Tasmari" the tumult of the storm increased tenfold. There came a flash of lightning,

brilliant as a burning world—elemental sound engulfed us, and the lights in the room flickered and went out. I saw Carac leap.

Then faintly above the roar which the concussion left pounding at my ear-drums, came the sound of struggling beings, the stamp of feet and the impact of blows.

A moment later I had located the sound, and knew its cause. Tasmari, in the body of Carac, was attacking Duval. I leaped in and a flying fist caught me behind the ear with a force which stunned.

Duval's voice!

"Harry! quick, she's got a knife." Then came a moan of pain and an exultant cry from Carac. I groped my way to them again, fearful lest in the dark I should aid Duval's foe by mistake. I never reached my goal.

A light breeze fanned my face and something touched my cheek. There came a beating of wings and a scream of rage from Carac, which trailed off into a gurgling, sickening gargle. I heard the faint impact of a blow and a cry from the bird. A continued thrashing of wings. Silence.

The lights came on. The circuit breaker which had been thrown by the bolt of lightning had been closed again. My eyes were met by a gruesome sight.

Duval was holding his shoulder, from which the blood oozed. Lying supine, head thrown back, was Carac, hate and life fading from his eyes. Fastened to his throat was the white

owl, which had struck unerringly in the dark, when neither I nor Duval could see our foe.

Her wings were moving feebly, while in her white breast was a knife, to the hilt, around which was a slowly spreading stain.

Duval's eyes fell upon the bird. Still sunk in the ghastly wounds they had torn were its talons, but the white owl was dying. Paul crept over to the bird, gently took its claws from their reddened bed, and softly held it in his arms. There were tears in his eyes.

"Marguerite! Marguerite! Faithful unto death! Always my dear love!"

Then I knew what I might have guessed. Duval had given Marguerite an earthly shelter from Tasmari's wrath,—the body of a white owl!

At his words the bird raised its head and placed it on Duval's shoulder. For an instant it held on. Then fell back.

"Dead," sighed Duval. "Dead, and God protect her from those fiends in whose hands she has gone."

A choking sound from Carac. The lips were moving. I bent my head over them and caught these words: "Tasmari scores this time."

The eyes closed. At the same time the clouds were erased from the face of the moon, which once more flooded the room with its light.

Note.—The previous adventures of Duval were narrated in "Duval's Weird Experiment" and "Queen of the Vortex," in the April and May numbers of WEIRD TALES.

