

# Weird Tales

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# THE FOURTH DIMENSION

By CHARLES FORD

**R**IPLEY sang aloud in pure joy as the bladelike bow of his racing canoe slipped through the water. The wind was northwest and puffy, and the lake showed a lively blue and white under the sky. As he came about, over to windward he could see the green of the golf links slanting up from the water's edge and the white clubhouse gleaming through the trees; overhead the white and tinted clouds sailed before the wind, hardly dimming the sunshine. It was a pretty picture from the water, and he loved it. As the wind heeled the canoe over, his muscular legs shot him up to windward and the lively craft swished through the water, every puff wetting the sails half-way to their peaks and showering him with spray. Golf and tennis were good; but nothing wiped out the worries of a difficult and precarious business as did the little canoe. It needed skill, muscle and quick wits—a man's play.

Starting his sheets a bit, he stood out into the lake and hauled her into the wind again. Then a vicious blast came down the hill, the slide jammed and he went over.

A ducking was the least of his troubles; he was used to it. But this time something went wrong. His head struck a spar; and when at last he found himself swimming easily toward the boathouse that showed its gay awnings in a little cove below the clubhouse, he thought he must have

been unconscious for a minute or two. Pulling himself up on the float, he turned, but could see nothing of the capsized canoe.

"I'll send Jimmy out for it," he said to himself, and went into the locker room for a rub-down. It struck him as rather singular that when he went out, float and boathouse and locker room had been gay with many-colored canoes, and girls in summer dresses, and men talking over golf scores and exchanging alibis and experiences. Now everything was quiet but for a few men he didn't know talking soberly in the locker room.

"Well, that ducking took Miller off my mind for a while, anyhow. Queer that crack on my skull didn't raise a lump," he mused, rubbing his head cautiously.

Jimmy did not appear by the time Ripley had changed, and he took out his clubs and strolled up the slope to the first tee. He felt a little tired and dazed, and it might be amusing to watch them drive off. Perhaps he would feel like playing a few holes if some acquaintance showed up about the time Miller began pestering him again. But it wasn't the Miller business that puzzled him now. The tee was the same, railing and water-can and sand-box were just where they belonged. The narrowing vista of the first fairway with the green and its tiny flag perched up on a knoll four hundred yards away were as usual.

The long ranks of translucent clouds sailing down the wind with their shadows flitting down the hill ahead of them were just as they had looked from the lake. Out there several racing canoes like his own danced over the whitecaps and heeled down before the puffs of wind. That puzzled him. His had been the only one of that type of canoe left on the lake because they were thought pretty risky for such treacherous water. Golfers drove off, several foursomes, and passed on up the course, but he didn't seem to know one of them. They seemed to be having a good time, but there wasn't any of the usual loud chaffing about handicaps and bets. Even the caddies were subdued. Somehow things were different.

A tall man, with a long, clean-shaven, pleasant face sat down beside him, nursing between his knees a formidable outfit of clubs. There was something about him that stirred Ripley's recollections, but he couldn't place him. Ripley nodded, however, and the stranger greeted him pleasantly.

"I don't think I've met you before. You're Mr. Ripley, aren't you? My name's Longdon."

Ripley stared a little. Where had he heard of Longdon? There was a famous racing-canoe man of that name; but somehow it stuck in Ripley's mind that the Longdon he was thinking of had been in the navy during the war and had lost his life saving a lot of others from an explosion on board a destroyer. This man couldn't be the same Longdon.

"Playing today?" asked Longdon.

Ripley shook his head. "I thought I would, but I'm a little tired," he said. "Just had a bad spill on the lake and my head doesn't seem quite right. Got a knock against the mast going over. I think I'll hunt up Jimmy and get him to go out after my canoe."

"If you don't mind, I'll walk down with you for a cigarette," Longdon said; and together they went down the slope to the boathouse, Longdon clipping dandelion heads with his putter as they strolled along. Ripley was aware of a certain restraint about his companion, as if he wanted to say something and didn't quite know how to go about it. They reached the landing, and sat down on a bench, looking out over the water and smoking in silence.

Suddenly Ripley saw a queer thing. It seemed as if the pretty scene before them rolled aside, and out there was a dory where there had been no dory before. Three men were in it, dragging for something in the lake; and alongside the dory was a cap-sized canoe, its green hull and a bit of white sail showing on the water.

Longdon looked at him sympathetically, but Ripley couldn't understand the look.

"Why, that's my canoe!" cried Ripley. "Jimmy must have — What in the world are they dragging for?"

Longdon said: "It is your canoe. Don't you understand now?"

