

*A Fantastic Fragment of Fiction*

# THE GOD YUANO

By MARJORIE DARTER

IT is near the first of the month when the sacrifice to "Yuano," the alligator, is made. The natives of the village daily pay homage to the brutes as they float in the swamp. They are afraid Yuano may cast his baleful glance upon them, when, such being the case, they would be offered up as sacrifices, since the lots would be sure to be against them.

It is the custom at this time for all in the village to assemble in the sacrificial hut and draw lots. These are of two sizes, long and short. Those who are unfortunate enough to draw short lots are sacrificed one month and the long lots are given the next, and so on.

Horrible? No, just customary sacrifice, not especially pleasant for the unlucky devils, but they believe in thus dying so that their spirits may be assured of eternal rest and happiness.

Is it strange that these words should come from a white man's pen? No, it is not, for I am dead and so am permitted to speak to the material world through others. Thus it is of my former life and death I shall tell.

It was the drawing of the lots, as I have said, and all were assembled to hear the chief Yuano priest read the sacrificial notes and decrees. He stated that twenty natives would appease the Gods this month and that old and young alike should draw.

I trembled and clung closer to my mother's skirts, for I was but a young lad and life was sweet to me. I did not like the ugly, grinning jaws and wickedly gleaming small eyes of the God Yuano. I did not wish to leave the flowers and beasts of this world for the

"Eternal Sphere." So I clung the closer to my mother and tremblingly drew one of the straws the old priest held out to me. *It was a short straw!* Did I live, or—was I to be thrown in among those slimy, squirming bodies to be engulfed at one swallow or broken in so many pieces by the swish of a mighty tail?

Horrible shivers ran up and down my spine, little icy tinglings formed in my blood, cold sweat beaded my forehead, I trembled and shook and leaned heavily against my mother as the script was read. The short ones were to be offered this month!

God in heaven, what a death! I swayed limply forward in a dead faint as I dimly heard the wailing for those chosen twenty. Then all was blackness.

When I "came to," I was lying in a basket floating in the swamp! Huge jaws yawned about and stretched toward me; slimy, slippery bodies lunged against my frail craft. I screamed in my terror, one scream after another, till it seemed my lungs must surely burst under the strain. Still my craft remained intact, and gradually I became more quiet.

I then looked around for my other nineteen companions, but they were nowhere to be seen. At some distance from me I beheld another basket-like craft floating upside down. I shuddered and threw my arm up over my face. My very much beloved companions had already met death. I alone remained! Probably my life was prolonged because of this very fact, and Yuano was no longer hungry! Thus was I given a few more minutes respite in which to

think upon the horrible death before me.

Day after day I floated down the swampy river propelled by the swishing of the heavy bodies of my tormentors in the black and rank waters. My little craft was still unhurt and I was buoyed up by the hope that I might starve to death before one of their lunges should upset me. But no, I was not to cheat the Gods thus, for a huge log crashed into me, and over I went with a shrill horrified cry into the open jaws of a waiting Yuano!

A terrible feeling of sharp knives literally tearing the tender flesh from my body, of huge breakers or stones crushing the life from me, and then, after a final moment of excruciating pain, I awoke to find myself standing calmly upon the back of a one time much-feared Yuano, while he crunched between his massive jaws a mass of blood and bones which had once been I!

I felt no emotion either of fear or of pain. But when the Yuano had finished his repast, I calmly stepped from one back to another and in less than five minutes had arrived in my native village. As I walked along the streets I spoke to several people, all of whom passed me by unseeing. I was rather hurt by this, as I thought they should be glad of my escape. However, I consoled myself with the thought of my mother's joy when she should again behold her beloved and much cherished son.

Hastening my stride I set forth for her hut. What was my surprise upon entering and greeting her to hear her say to my sister, "Vellen, Vellen, why couldn't it have been you? Oh, if only my son were here again. You are good

for nothing, while he—! Ah, my son, my son!"

Upon hearing these words I came to the conclusion that she had not seen or heard me, so spoke again, this time in a louder tone of voice. But she paid no heed and continued to weep and bemoan my fate.

Then a horrible, terrifying thought dawned upon my wondering brain. Suppose I were really dead? Suppose I had not escaped as I thought, and were in truth a spirit and no longer able to communicate with those I held dear to me on earth! As these terrible thoughts rushed upon me, I gasped and stumbled blindly from the hut. An insistent voice within monotonously repeated these words, "Dead, dead, yes, dead!"

So for weeks I wandered aimlessly over the Universe in a seemingly void space, without man, beast or reptile. I wandered over spacious cities, broad forest lands and at last, becoming weary, sank to the streets of a large city.

People rushed over me, through me, around me and in all directions. They were a curious people and so, having nothing to do, I watched them from mere curiosity. Then, as my interest grew, I centered my attention upon a few. I listened to what they were saying, and was startled to hear one gray-haired old gentleman remark, "Yes, sir, Maudin, I'm telling you I saw that spirit with my own eyes, and later communicated with it! How? With pen and paper. I have the proofs; come along and see for yourself. Then if you still disbelieve you may scoff."

At these words my heart gave a great leap and seemed to turn over in my breast. If one spirit could speak through others, why not I? Buoyed up with this hope and elation, I followed the two to see how it was done.

The little man and Maudin first entered a dark room and seated themselves at a table. Pen and paper were given Maudin.

"Now," said the other, "leave your hand lax and see what happens. Think of nothing. You will not long scoff."

Fully five minutes passed before the hand began to move, and then glancing up at the force which was moving the hand, I was not a little astonished to see a filmy, wraithlike being like myself standing beside me. The seance soon ended and the spirit departed.

All that day and the next I hovered near the little old gentleman, hoping to be able to attract his attention and speak to him through the medium of a pen. At last I succeeded and am now writing through that little gray-haired man's hand this very instant and intend to do so for some time, thereby keeping in touch with the material world.

Perhaps some will scoff at this and call it the imaginings of one a trifle given to the subject of spiritualism. Be that as it may, I have done my best to set down for all the story of my life and death; and now, this tale finished, I must away to my shadowy realm again.

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