

Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

SEPTEMBER, 1946

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Except for personal experiences, the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

Published bi-monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y. Reentered as second-class matter January 26, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 15 cents. Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions, 20c. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. English Office: Charles Lavell, Limited, 4 Clements Inn, Strand London, W.C.2, England. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. Copyright, 1946, by Weird Tales. Copyrighted in Great Britain. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office.

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

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Vol. 39, No. 7

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The Horn

BY
CHARLES
KING



Beware the Cornucopia; and fear knowing too much as you would the Devil!

“IT WON’T take more than a minute, Pop, come on.” The voice was wheedling as if trying to extract a favor—which it was.

“I know, son, I know, but I’m very busy just now.”

“Aw, Pop, it isn’t often that I bother you.” Then, quickly, anticipating the an-

swer: “I gotta keep busy. It’s for your sake really . . . so’s I can keep out of your way. Honest.”

Quick amusement flashed, and then died, in the other’s eyes. “Doing it all for my sake, eh? Getting pretty smooth, aren’t you?”

“Well . . . you know what I mean. After

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

all it's for my collection . . . an' I got to practice, don't I?"

"Certainly," the other cut in smoothly, "so you can grow to be like me; follow in my—hum—footsteps. All right, just don't give me that routine again." And, once again, amusement flickered across his face.

"Swell, Pop, swell. My collection's fallin' off on account of my experiments. . . ." But the other wasn't listening. Motionless, holding a pose that seemed impossible to maintain, it was as if he listened to far-off music. For long moments he remained thus, immobile, quiescent, and then his features wrinkled into a frank grin.

"Teach them a good lesson . . . a good one. Grown men . . . discussing . . . old wives' tales . . ." he muttered to himself. His hand swept upward, stopped at his head a second, and then continued its powerful upward flow.

"Thanks, Pop."

"Fotget it; son . . . a pleasure."

Both chuckled as if sharing some old private joke that wore well with the telling.

THE town of Evergreen deserved its name. Nestling between protecting hills, it showed its gratitude by taking care of its trees, cozy dwellings and College. The inhabitants of Evergreen were proud of many things, but it was an innocent pride. They loved their valley which spelled home; they were rigorous in defense of their civic code and all it entailed; they delighted in the way that their children grew up straight and strong, benefited by the health-giving air that permeated Evergreen combined with the good wishes of all residents manifested towards each other; but, mostly, they were proud of their College.

For the College was the fount of all. It literally nurtured and tended the existence of the town. Generously endowed by a merchant tired of all big cities, it had been able to attract Professors of a sort who inevitably brought, in their wake, students hungry for liberally detailed knowledge. Students who, in spite of themselves, would spread the fame of Evergreen . . . and its fortune. Fortune, yes, because these students from the Earth's distant reaches brought money into the town. And the town loved the students.

This very moment, a portion of these students were listening with properly bated breath to the world-famous, and admired, Professor Savantte.

"Mythology, my young friends, is neither to be accepted easily . . . nor dismissed lightly." A bit pleased with his phrasing, he halted. Then, clearing his throat as if for great things to come: "Remember my words of a short space ago?"

Eager hands fought for recognition. From out the babel of voices phrases asserted themselves: "Yes, Professor, you were speaking of the Nurse of Zeus . . ." "It was a woman . . ." "No! A Goat!"

Professor Savantte's worn hand flapped a command for silence. "Please, young friends, let me review. I was lecturing upon the mythological *Amalthea*. She has been described, as I've said before, as a giant goat which suckled the Master of mythological gods—*Zeus*. In gratitude—as set down by the most ancient of scholars—he set the goat amidst the very stars. . . ."

"Or as a nymph, Professor," an impatient voice sliced in.

"Quite. Or as a nymph. And, so the legend continues, one of the goat's horns was marvelously endowed with the virtue of becoming filled with whatever its possessor—any possessor—wished. Hence," the Professor calmly expounded, "it has been termed both 'horn of plenty' and 'cornucopia.'"

SEDATELY, in cultured accents, the voice mused on: "Think, think, my friends, if the mystic tales brought to us through the mediums of many minds and many tongues were true, what it would mean to possess something which represented one's desires from zero to infinity." Lost in imaginings, the Professor's voice died away.

"Professor!" broke in an eager voice, "I know what I would do. I'd endow all branches of Science so that they could work endlessly for the benefit of Mankind."

"That is silly," another objected. "If you could control the Cornucopia then there'd be no need for that. You could compel those benefits to emanate right from the 'Horn' itself. Isn't that right, Professor?"

Smiling, the Professor spoke. "It seems to me that what is most important is your

cumulative reaction. None of you has evinced any selfish desire to turn this magical property—providing, of course, that you did possess it—to your own immediate desires. You all, and it is to your credit, would seek to benefit others. Students, I am proud of you. . . .”

“Look!”

More than a bit angry at being summarily cut off, once embarked upon a sea of rhetoric, Professor Savantte nevertheless turned with the others . . . and gaped.

A portion of one of the walls had assumed a slightly nebulous property. Before the astonished eyes of the observers the portion of wall rapidly took on a bewildering array of colors. Starting with the very light, it turned itself into darker and darker shades until the final result was one of sheer blackness; a blackness as impenetrable as solid matter.

“M-my goodness. . . .”

BUT the Professor's voice trailed into nothingness as a tiny vortex of movement introduced itself into the center of the pulsing black mass.

Faster and faster it whirled, attaining a speed causing acute dizziness to all who beheld it. Larger and larger it grew, forming a cone-shaped object comprising all the colors previously seen. Agonizingly beautiful, it held the onlookers silently spellbound. Then, when their emotions had been stretched to a point where several felt themselves upon the verge of tears, it detached itself completely from the black mass and dropped to the floor. . . .

A curved cone of ruby red.

As if impelled by a giant hand the onlookers circled about the object. For several moments the soundless tableau continued, and then again, as if stimulated by an outside power, all breathed the same word: “*Cornucopia.*”

The Professor was the first to recover. “My friends, this . . . this is nonsense. We've been victims of a prank. Probably mass hypnotism . . . or . . . or . . .”

“Yes, Professor, that's possible . . . except, er, do you recall that black spot on the wall?”

“Pah! An induced illusion!”

“Look.”

PROFESSOR SAVANTTE looked—and gulped. It was still there. “I will conduct an experiment to prove that it is—ah—illusion.” The Professor's voice was shaky, but he didn't lack courage. Picking up a handful of keys attached to a ring he tossed them at the black spot. They disappeared without a jingle. As simply as that.

In the stark silence that followed, the old man picked up the iridescent red cone and laid it upon his desk. In the slight interval that he'd held it, a strange surging force had coursed through him. It was not unpleasant; rather, it had given him a heady, though transitory, feeling of recaptured youth.

Quietly, the students circled about him and the faintly glowing object lying upon his desk. Even those who were frankly afraid of what they'd seen, found themselves joining the tight cluster. Whatever it was, that had entered their lives in so odd a fashion, it exerted an hypnotic compulsion that would not be denied.

“If it is the *Cornucopia*, students, then think how fortunate we are to have it thrust upon us. In the hands of evil men, or men capable of submerging the good of the many to the wilful gain of the few, it would be tragedy indeed.” A slight pause. Then: “That is, assuming that we *are* confronted by the *Cornucopia*. Bye the bye, I'm sorry I threw my keys into that blackness; I wish I had them back. . . . *Ulp!*”

Gently easing from the red cone, the ring of keys tinkled onto the desk.

“*Christ!*”

Gone was all doubt. How it had come, or why, was no longer important; not worthy of further conjecture. What was uppermost in all minds was that they were the actual possessors of the horn of plenty . . . the horn that would spew out whatever—anything—they wished.

As the Professor had said, it was fortunate that the horn had not fallen among evil men. Such men would have immediately fought tooth and nail for the crimson-colored treasure. But, these were palpably men of education. They pondered the problem gravely, each occupied with his own thoughts. Thus, it took at least five minutes before they fell upon each other, collective madness in their eyes.

Swaying like a tree before the onslaught

of loosed elements, the human group surged this way and that. Then, due to the demonic fury of blind, bloody combat, the tangled mass fell heavily to the floor. No quarter was asked; none was given. Knees jerked upward seeking to inflict mortal injury; teeth sank into soft flesh and ripped and tore; clawed fingers probed for eyeballs that could be crushed.

From the central point of the flailing, gouging mass, blood bubbled outward in red ripples.

The youngest and the strongest were winning out—to no avail. In the heat and fire of the struggle they didn't notice that they were becoming smaller. On and on they fought until only one remained. Swaying to his feet, he shrieked with triumph, the shriek becoming a bleat of terror when he saw the desk looming above him like a wooden skyscraper, the horn irretrievably out of his reach. He toppled forward onto the still pulsing human mound.

"THANKS a lot, Pop. You were swell."
"That's all right, son, just put your experiments to good use."

"Don't worry about *that*. I want to make you proud of me, like I said."

Seriousness crept into the older one's voice. "Good boy. Though this latest group for your collection is a bit on the stupid side, they are still worthy of study. Make proper use of them."

"I sure will, Pop. I know that when I grow up I got to take your place an' well, I want to be as good as you are."

A hand patted the younger one's head. "You will you've got the stuff in you. And now, enough of talk. You have to study your collection and I have to be getting back to my work."

"Okay." Deftly the younger one's hand raised the glistening red cone, poised it at an angle, and let the contents tumble out. There were tiny whisperings and rustlings almost too faint to be heard.

A hand scooped up Professor Savantte and the students and lovingly laid them upon a board. Then, as the small sounds grew momentarily louder, one by one the group was pinned next to others who had ceased to struggle long, long ago.

"Here you are, Pop."

The older of the two reached down for the ruby cone. He swept it up and, again, his hands stopped at his head. The cone was placed to one side of the massive skull and immediately took hold as if impelled by incredible suction. It matched, in precise exactitude, the cone on the other side of the enormous head.

One last fond look at the absorbed youngster, busy at his work; a brief remark about "incredible stupidity of the human race," and the older one strode away . . . hooves clacking sharply against the flooring, and forked tail swishing from side to side.

