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*What Dread Fate Took the Crew and
Passengers of This Mystery Ship in the Pacific?*

The Masters From Beyond

By EDWARD PODOLSKY

Author of "The Figure of Anubis"

ANYONE in Gloucester can recall the *Caroline*; the "Mystery Ship," she was later called. The day had been calm and beautiful. In the late forenoon a strange craft drifted silently, almost like a ghost, into port and ran ashore. Her sail was set and rudder lashed against her stern. Captain Musgrave, from the first, had become impressed with a feeling that there was something queer about her, so he summoned his two old cronies, Lawyer Mackey and Dr. Underhill, and these three boarded the ship.

"Dreadfully quiet," murmured the captain in the course of the inspection.

"Something indefinably queer; the whole ship seems saturated with mystery," affirmed Lawyer Mackey.

Nowhere was anyone to be seen. Two chairs had remained undisturbed on deck. In the cabin the table was set for a meal. The beds had been made up. Silken dresses hung in the wardrobes. Everything was left untouched. Nowhere were there any signs of violence or struggle.

"What has become of the crew and passengers?" asked Captain Musgrave.

Presently Dr. Underhill returned, bearing in his hand a thick copy book. "This may enlighten us a bit," he said to his friends.

"The ship's log?" queried the captain, most eagerly.

"No. Evidently more important. I found this in the captain's cabin and

it bears quite a lurid title: *Last Days in a Lifeless World*, and, also a subtitle: *The Masters From Beyond*."

The most amazing document that had ever been written was that one discovered by Dr. Underhill in the captain's cabin. This manuscript seemed to have been guarded with more than jealous care by these three old men, and it was only after the death of the last of them, Captain Musgrave, that the manuscript finally passed into the hands of one who has seen fit to put it before the general public.

THE MANUSCRIPT

THE day dies slowly, almost with a gasp, it seems. Soon night will come—a dreadful night of a lifeless world, a yawning void. The moon already appears in the gray heavens, like a brazen ball, tarnished, and grinning through the depressive haze. I alone am left out of passengers and a crew that numbered a hundred, alone in a soundless and colorless world. I appear to be moving in an abode of spirits, as if in a vision; I neither feel, nor hear, nor perceive the slightest sensation. I but see, and only through my sight am I aware of a dreadful sickliness, a depressive calm that envelops all, everywhere.

We set sail from San Francisco on a trip to the Philippines, June 20, 1898. The weather was propitious, and for several days nothing went amiss. On the sixth day a tempest

arose and we were driven many miles out of our course. When the storm had subsided, which was as suddenly as it had come, we found ourselves in strange waters. The sky seemed to have taken on a new aspect; the waters were calm, not a ripple disturbed the sea as far as the eye could see.

A depressive calm was about us; it seemed to be rising from the very sea itself. The air was suffused with a sickly, jaundiced yellowness. The sun hung low in the sky, enormous and leering, with a calm fierceness.

"Does it strike you that we look small, almost fearfully small?"

Lawton spoke these words to me. I had noticed, from the beginning, the awful expanse of sea and space about us. The bigness of it all was stupendous, overwhelming.

We lived for three lifeless days and nights in a lifeless world. We seemed to move like ghosts in spirit land. The awful monotony sank into our souls and became part of us.

On the fourth day terror came upon us. A disappearance was reported from among the passengers.

"Mr. Clarekle has gone, sir."

"Gone? How?"

"Disappeared, sir. Mr. Lawton said he is coming up to see you presently."

"WELL, Lawton," I greeted my friend, "how—?"

"It's come, Gennert. We're done for."

I gazed at him, amazed, then startled. "What's come, Lawton?" I finally found words to ask.

"It's one of these—masters from beyond, that's a name as good as any. You know how Clarekle disappeared? He was fished up, vanished right before our eyes. Walden, MacGregor and I were speaking to him and he was snatched up from the very midst of us."

"Now you're talking nonsense," I said with an attempt at a chuckle.

"This ungodly atmosphere is getting on our nerves—"

From afore came a startled cry, then a sudden silence. Later, Kirke was described to have vanished under the same circumstances that had surrounded the disappearance of Clarekle.

I was stumped, puzzled. I retired to my cabin and flung myself upon the bed. I dozed off, and now and then I imagined I heard startled cries, moans, then silence. I fell asleep.

I must have slept for some time, for when I awoke the moon hung in the eternally gray heavens. Always that same moon, painted in faint blood and grinning. The depressiveness seemed to have increased; the calm, the lifelessness, seemed to have become greater.

At the door I met Lawton; he had a strangely wistful look in his eyes. "How are you, Gennert?" he said. I returned his greeting. "There's no one on ship," he continued.

"No one on ship! What's become of them? Jumped overboard?"

Lawton looked steadily at me for a space. "No," he answered, "they've disappeared, gone, vanished, much the same as Clarekle and Kirke."

Then for the first time in that senseless, silly world I became afraid. "We're mad, Lawton, both of us. The very atmosphere is saturated with a madness, a strange unreality." Lawton assented silently. "We're the only ones left, and we'll make the best of the situation."

WE WENT on deck and sat down to talk.

"Gennert," said Lawton in the course of our conversation, "our fate will be much the same as that of the *Marie Celeste*—"

"The *Marie Celeste*!" I broke in.

"Yes. The captain and his family and the crew disappeared quite suddenly and mysteriously out at sea, and

the ship drifted back as mute testimony to an occurrence which seems beyond credence."

"How do you account for the disappearance?"

"In the same manner that I account for the disappearance of our crew and passengers. This super-race from somewhere in space, masters, as I always called them, from beyond. We're owned, Gennert, owned by someone, something superior to us—some thing or things with superior intelligence, inhabitants of some distant world who quite easily come down to earth, as we can descend to the bottom of the sea. We may be of value to them, as food, perhaps, as fish are to us."

"And have there been any signs, any proof of such a race of superhuman beings, as you call them?" I asked, a little impressed with his yarn.

Lawton hesitated but a few seconds, and then resumed with the same zest that had characterized his talk before. "Of course," he said, "there have been proofs, both visible and invisible. Of the latter I recall the curious case of Mrs. Charton, at Sutton Court-house, Sutton Lane, Chiswick, in whose home windows were mysteriously broken. The mansion was detached and surrounded by high walls. No other building was near it. The police were called. The constables, assisted by members of the household, guarded the house, but the windows continued to be broken, both in front and behind the house. A still more impressive visitation from these visitors from beyond was told to me by an old tar. At midnight, February 24, 1885, Latitude 37° N., and Longitude 170° E., somewhere between Yokohama and Victoria, the captain of the bark *Innerwich* was aroused by his mate, who had seen something unusual in the sky. The captain went on deck and saw the sky turning fiery red. All at once a large mass of fire appeared over the vessel, completely

blinding the spectators. The fiery mass fell into the sea. The bark was struck flat aback, and a roaring white sea passed ahead. Then again, Captain Breyer of the Dutch steamer *Valentijn* was in the South China Sea, when at midnight he saw a rotation of flashes. It looked like a horizontal wheel turning rapidly, and it was above water. Perhaps the wheel of a vessel of the super-race from beyond! At another time two wheels of fire were seen which the men described as rolling millstones of fire—"

"What I want is positive proofs," I cried out in exasperation, "proofs that those masters from beyond have been upon the earth."

"You shall have them," Lawton quickly answered. "A convincing proof of these super-things is their footprints. Some thirty years ago, at Devonshire, footprints were discovered in the snow. They were clawed footmarks of an unclassifiable form alternating at huge but regular intervals with what seemed to be the impression of the point of a stick. But the scattering of the prints was over an amazing expanse of territory; obstacles, such as hedges, walls, houses, were surmounted. There was intense excitement; the track was followed by huntsmen and hounds, until they came to a forest, from which the hounds retreated baying and terrified. Nobody dared to enter the forest. Then again, a considerable sensation was caused in the towns of Topsham, Lymphstone, Exmouth, Teighmouth, and Dawlish, in Devonshire, by a vast number of foot tracks of a most strange and mysterious description. These marks were generally eight inches in advance of each other; the impressions were cones in incomplete, or concentric basins. The footprints looked as if branded with a hot iron. Also in Scotland, among the high mountains where Glenorchy, Glenlyon and Glenochay are contiguous, there have been met with several times, dur-

ing several winters, the tracks of a creature never seen before. From the depth that the feet sank in the snow the creature must have been of considerable size. I may also cite instances of mysterious disappearances under the weirdest circumstances, which, for some reason or another, have been kept still. There is a village in northern Russia where the three most prominent citizens were found in a forest, beside the track of one of these super-things, with their heads split open, as if pressure had been applied by two enormous fingers, one at the forehead, the other at the back of the head. Their brains were missing, eaten out, it seemed, from their very heads."

"It seems," I jested grimly, "that our brains are of some use, after all. These masters from beyond, as you call them, are epicures of an advanced sort."

Lawton was in no mood for jesting. In fact, his face seemed to me to have become a bit haggard and drawn. "I tell you, Captain,"—his voice was almost a groan now—"that we're owned by a race of super-creatures."

I said nothing; I sat and simply stared at Lawton. Midnight was rapidly approaching, and with it a darkness, intense and frightful. The

oppressive calm lay like a mantle over the lifeless sea. The grinning moon and the sickly stars were obscured by the fearful blackness. After a time the pitchy darkness was succeeded by a lurid gloom such as I had never seen. It seemed that the sky was afire, and the sea also. On every side the lurid gloom surrounded us. Lawton sat with his eyes staring into the fire-colored spaces. I found no words to break the awful monotony; I sat and stared at Lawton. Yet even as my gaze was concentrated upon him a strange mist seemed to crawl around him. He grew thinner and thinner, and then, with a snap, he seemed to disappear upward.

I know not whether to believe the testimony of my senses; or is it that my mind has lost its grip? The ship is fastened in a motionless sea; I am the only living being in a lifeless world. I know that if I should try to jump overboard the sea would not receive me. It is green and full of sloth and seems thick like jelly. The weariness of it all has entered my soul. I have no interest to—.

HERE the document ends abruptly, and the fate of Captain Gennert, no doubt, was the fate of his crew and passengers.

