

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 33

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Published monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. Entered as second class matter September 24, 1938, at the post office at New York, N. Y. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription rates: One year in the United States and possessions, Cuba, Mexico, South America, Spain, \$2.50; Canada, \$2.75; elsewhere, \$3.00. English Office: Charles Lovell, 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. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH



"The strange lights made him giddy!"

The Metal Chamber

By DUANE W. RIMEL

A strange and curious tale about a scientist whose telepathic experiments contacted another planet, to his destruction

I MUST write this account carefully to avoid extravagance and inaccuracy. Certain emotional overtones will doubtless creep in, however, for I have been subjected to a train of events that might excite and bewilder any man. Still, I hope that some *natural* physical law will explain the phenomena which I have witnessed in the last forty-eight hours or more; I do not know how much time has

slipped by since I fell asleep in my study and regained consciousness in surroundings so utterly strange that I hardly know how to react to them.

I am writing on the floor of a huge metal room whose lofty, arched ceiling rises some twenty feet above a smooth, glassy floor of a substance unknown to me. The walls are made of frosty-looking metal that reflects a partial image, and there are no visible doors

or windows. The method used in placing me here I do not know. I am an outcast in a huge vault; trapped, apparently, in a metallic tomb. And I cannot remember *how* or *why*!

Prior to this unexplainable episode, I had been studying telepathy in my laboratory near Hampdon, and had conducted several successful experiments on my Chinese cook, Fong Lee. Yes, I can safely say that I have advanced far along these lines; too far to permit a blundering, machine-crazed people to lay hands on it. What I have discovered would entirely corrupt society as it is practised today—society with its shallowness, lies and deceit. People would have to learn how to conceal from others their brash thoughts, and I dared not risk it, save on those whom I could trust. Even then I was careful how I questioned Fong Lee about what he had been thinking. Poor devil! I read every thought his queer brain was trying to conceal by spoken banalities, but told him only a portion of the entire mess, enough to convince me that I had probed beneath the surface and found what I had been looking for. How simple, brutal and animalistic human thoughts are! Man has so long reasoned differently that his spoken word indicated that once a means of mental communication were available, sensitive and delicate repression would have to be practised in order to conceal his selfish, greedy hates and passions.

When I try to remember exactly *how* I accomplished these things, my mind refuses to function. Apparently I have suffered some devastating shock and lost my memory—but I cannot understand why this loss of the past should concern only *certain* points. I realize that I performed wonderful experiments, and even carried some of them

out to perfection; but the ultimate purpose behind all that work eludes me as though it had never been formulated. Am I to be forever separated by the wall of partial amnesia from realizing the possibilities of my discovery?

There are so many conflicting emotions—the strange room, the queer lights, and the sense of total alienation—that I am rather terrified. An explanation will develop sooner or later, and as an amateur biologist, I should not lose my head over some new, inexplicable phenomena. Perhaps I should state here that I do not remember exactly when I lost total consciousness, but it seems to have been near the night of March 20th, 1936. Before that, all is clear save those things dealing directly with and mechanically associated to my discovery.

For instance, I can remember the day I ran across my theory, and the marvelous possibilities it unfolded; and I even recall that my laboratory had something to do with it. But that is all. . . . The sensation is bewildering and maddening; trying to remember a dream of apparently dreadful significance and having the important factors evade one like the faery substance that visions are a part of. Perhaps some nervous stimulation or concentration will uncover those buried sections in my brain. The fact that I had discarded the idea of giving my knowledge to humanity seems significant; for it is probable that I turned to *other* fields of experimentation. . . .

BACK to this room again. I wish I knew more about architecture; I'm sure that I could appreciate more fully the unusual features of this place and gather new ideas on structure, placement and proportion. The geometry seems a little awry and dis-

turbing to the eye, but I cannot put my finger on its faults, if any. It must have been made for persons larger than I am. The lights, consisting of three large phosphorescent globes, are apparently hanging from the ceiling, though no means of support is visible from the floor. They emit an undefinable yellow radiance that seems to pulse about the room rather than shine.

When I first awoke in this place I lay sprawled on the floor near a strange, rubber-like mat, and for a long while I supposed this weird radiance to be a filtering of daylight creeping in about the shaded windows of my study. Then I opened my eyes, raised my head and gaped in sheer amazement. At first I could only sit and stare—a curious fascination for the moment overcoming my fear. Seeing that my wrist-watch had stopped at 11:51, I tried to reason out the whole thing. Later I found some sheets of paper in my coat pocket, and set them aside for future use. I inspected the room closely, tried to find an exit, and finally returned to the mat, where I have remained since writing the above.

MUCH later. I lay down on the mat and soon fell into uneasy slumber. When I awoke I discovered a queer-looking metal goblet standing beside the mattress. The mug has no handle and is very nearly cone-shaped, the top being smaller in diameter than the bottom. It was filled with liquid. Being extremely thirsty, I tasted the fluid. It was rather salty and thick, but seemed to contain food value. I drained the mug and have felt no ill effects. How different from Fong Lee's savory dishes! How was it placed here? And by whom? Perhaps these frosty-looking walls are not as solid as they appear to be. I must have more sleep. . . .

Upon waking this last time I discovered that the goblet had been refilled. I drank a little and replaced it beside the mat, but further out. I scraped some dust and lint from my pockets and sprinkled it all around the mug. Maybe they'll leave some footprints if they don't notice the change. . . .

Have I mentioned that I fancy myself being watched continually? As time goes by, the uncomfortable sensation increases. I have searched the place for traces of a peep-hole, but have found none. Why should the actions of a normal, prisoned man be studied by hidden eyes?

A strange dizziness has come over me. My memory is becoming even more faulty. Perhaps the queer liquid is drugged. Need more rest. . . .

LATER. I had a fantastic dream. It can't have any significance . . . but it seems horribly related to my present situation. I lay down on the mat as usual and closed my eyes. Then a maelstrom of power seemed to hurtle me far, far away—to a familiar place. Again I was seated in my study, reading. Suddenly I heard a loud, thunderous noise, very near the house, and I ran outside to see what had happened. It was very dark, but in the starlight I saw a huge metal, egg-shaped cylinder resting on my front lawn! The whole strange craft glowed with a dimly familiar phosphorescence. A terrible, gnawing fear seized me, rooting me to the spot. An oblong door opened in the side of the cylinder, revealing a large hollow space inside, and much intricate machinery. I thought I saw movement near the door; then some invisible hand grasped me by the arm and dragged me inside the thing. The door snapped shut; a clap

of doom. The sensation of terrible fear lessened as a dream-like trance enveloped me. A transparent section of wall lay before my eyes, and I gazed out. For an instant the familiar house was visible through the glass, then disappeared abruptly. Blackness enveloped me. My senses were whirled in the paralyzing grip of powers utterly new and alien. I was conscious of rapid movement, and realized somehow that a guiding intelligence hovered near me. There seemed to be much movement within the room of the ship, but I could not see the beings which made that movement. Queer star formations shone beyond the small window. The dream became blurred; I seemed to be struggling from a bottomless abyss, through shadows of blackness and madness. Then I awoke.

Another terror holds me. After waking from the dream I noticed that the goblet was gone. Remembering the dust I had sprinkled around it, I inspected the area closely. Now I wish I hadn't. . . . Someone must have entered the chamber and made faint, outlandish designs in the lint. They can't be footprints. . . . I didn't look long, but they are beyond description. Did they, or he, come near me? I shudder at the thought.

Wait! I hear a sound at last! Can someone be coming to my rescue? God! for a glimpse of pure, wholesome daylight! The noise is coming from the walls, an insistent grating—the rasp of metal on metal. Ah! I see now! A huge space is being taken from the left-hand wall so that I can look out. . . . Where are the rescuers? I must stop writing and try the window.

LATER. I walked to that opening in the wall, but it was not a window. It was a door!—a door leading into

another room so vast that the very sight took my breath away. It must have been two hundred yards long and half that wide, resembling my prison save that at the further end was a huge raised dais or pedestal.

Then, while standing there in dumb amazement, I heard a soft movement near me, and cried out in horror. Something *invisible* touched my arm, led me through that doorway and down the center of that great room. I must write the truth. The beings near me—all about me (I now knew instinctively that the chamber was full of surging creatures)—were of some color that my eyes could not see. That, to me, with a scientific mind, did not seem impossible, but it was infinitely terrifying. I should have been more horrified than I actually was, but the food they had given me must have dulled my sense of fear. But when I remembered those puzzling designs in the lint on the floor in that other room, I trembled and grew weak.

At last we—I could still feel that queer clutch on my arm and hear shuffling movements beside me—approached the large pedestal. Here a terrible awe of the unknown overcame me. The paw left my arm and the shambling sounds retreated. I stood alone in front of what was doubtless the leader or king of the invisible horde. I looked up—but saw only the shiny metal shaft and the flat, round table on top. The strange lights made me giddy; my brain seemed to be tortured with hot irons, and I cried out in agony.

Suddenly the ache lessened and I was impelled by some other mind than my own to move to one side. A faint metallic clanging came from the wall near the dais, and a section of the frosty wall instantly became transparent. I had long since ceased to be awed at the

mechanical wonders about me, so that this astonishing change from metal to glass (the terms are merely symbolical) did not alarm me unduly. I was forced toward the rectangular glassy surface, and found myself looking out upon a monstrous vista. Before and below me lay a huge metal city of towers, domes and queerly angled structures, all lit by that same yellow radiance. Looking up to find the source, I saw far above in the dim distance a shiny concave shell—stretching from horizon to horizon—which apparently protected the city from the rigors of either intense heat or cold. Through this far-away film I could glimpse the darkness of a great void. Huge spheres of light, resembling the small ones in my prison, hovered over the city, suspended in midair by some physical law unknown to mankind.

There was movement in that polished, symmetrically perfect metropolis, but only the movement of mechanical objects. I could not see that which I was half afraid of seeing—the dwellers themselves; for I was now certain that I should lose my mind entirely if such a hideous sight were ever thrust upon me. The sensation of foreboding evil mounted as I made out a large central court in the maze beneath me, in the very center of which crouched a tall round gray tower. This one edifice did not appear to be made of metal, but of stone; and in the curiously angled windows I had my first glimpse of shadow in this nightmare world. For some unaccountable reason, the very suggestion of shadow made me tremble with fear. This I could scarcely understand until I realized that if ever these monstrous entities stood in a shadow of any sort they would become, to me, visible. I cannot explain how I knew these things—perhaps the beings were able to force

their unspoken thoughts upon me.

At that instant, feeling thousands of eyes upon me, I turned without any willing of my own and faced the tall dais. Once more my brains seemed to writhe and burn with icy fire. I screamed with pain and stumbled to the floor. Then merciful blackness engulfed me.

I came to my senses in the smaller room, on the rubber mat. God! I pray that I won't have to go through that ordeal another time. I was taken before their king, and I know that I was tried and judged and found wanting. . . .

Another noise. The door in the wall is opening again. Some object is being pushed through it. Great God! A long, metal cylinder! I've seen it *before*. . . . The one in my dream. Was it a dream? No! by Heaven, *it actually happened!*

The door in the ship is opening. Soon they will come after me. . . . They are still invisible. I must hurry; finish this. . . .

I see it all now. A trick—a monstrous, alien trick? Alien room. Of course I am not on the earth. But *where* am I? They brought me here—watched me . . . now where are they taking me? On to some new hell? I don't want to go near that gray tower . . . madness lurks there!

EVERYTHING is clear. I am a fool, a blundering idiot. Now I know how my experiments with telepathy touch on this horrid affair. I had devised a formula for a precious fluid that I took which created abnormal sensitivity to other brain waves. That's how I was able to read Fong Lee's mind. This fluid was my discovery . . . my ambition of a lifetime! Not content with experimenting on humanity, I wanted to go *beyond*. I took strong doses of the

stuff; tried to communicate with other worlds.

And I was successful! Yes, I spanned the void of cosmic space with thought waves—or rather I made my brain sensitive enough to receive outside thought emanations.

I contacted an alien intelligence on some remote planet—I do not even know which one. Enough that I had actually accomplished the impossible. My distant correspondents desired to come to my earth if I would show them the way; wanted to explore new territory. I am no mean astronomer. I directed them to the sphere inhabited by mankind. I remember that I went to my study to relax before the momentous occasion when outsiders would visit the earth. For it was but a matter of hours after I had given directions that I was to expect them. Then followed the devastating mental shock. They did not tell me they were going to take me when they returned to their world. I should have foreseen this move; been prepared. No wonder I was bewildered when I actually awakened on a strange planet—on *this* planet—*because I did not bring any of my serum to enable me to communicate with this alien intelligence.*

The human brain in its normal state cannot do it—will not. That's why—yes, the shock of their coming was too much. . . . A human brain is meant for earth. . . .

They are angry with me—I can sense it intuitively. Who can blame them? The chance no other human has ever been offered. . . . Only one way out. My pocket-knife. The blade is long enough. Should have done it before. . . . Got to

hurry . . . will fold up this Ms.—put it in my pocket. If they take me back . . .

* * * * *

I THOMAS MELLON, Chief of Police of Hampdon, offer this manuscript for publication in an effort to explain the disappearance of one Herman Standby, the above-mentioned person in this rambling account. Nearly a month ago Standby's Chinese cook reported that during the night of March 21, 1936, he heard a loud disturbance near his employer's front lawn. Too frightened to investigate, Fong Lee said he awoke the next morning and found Standby gone; a great blasted and burnt area in front of the house. Upon investigation the following day, I found these statements to be true. No evidence has been uncovered to reveal the cause of this terrible scar on the earth.

Two weeks later Standby reappeared very mysteriously. How he returned without leaving traces of his whereabouts during the two weeks is a subject for speculation.

He was found near his front porch on the morning of April 6th, and according to the coroner, had been dead some twenty-four hours. Discovery of the body was made by a neighbor, who telephoned this office immediately. The cause of his death is not known for certain, but is believed to have been caused by severe nervous shock. His throat was scarred, as if he had at one time attempted suicide. The strange discoloration of Standby's flesh and the unusual position of his eyes indicating wild terror were not explained by the coroner. The above narrative, in loosely scrawled longhand, was found on Standby's clothing. Case closed.

