

MONSTER

PARADE

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IRWIN STEIN
Publisher

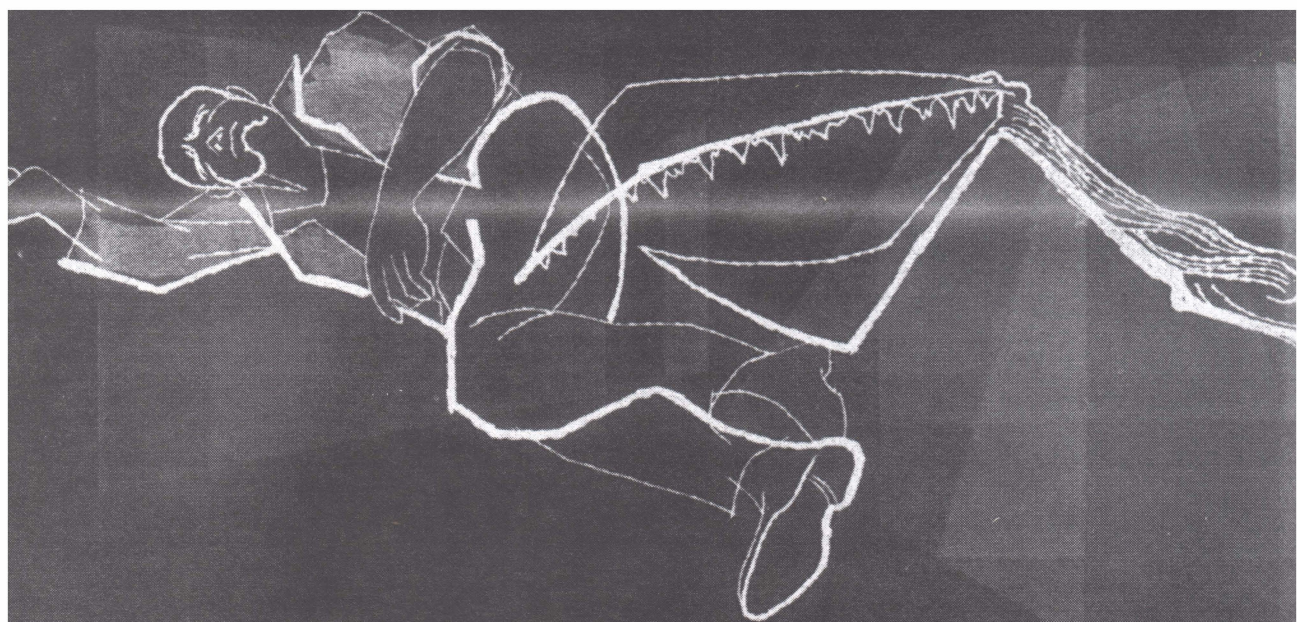
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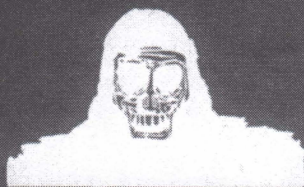
THE OLD GHOUL
Your Host and Narrator



*Can you kill a shadow . . . or a reflection
in a mirror? Then how could they
kill this Monster who was made of
nothing . . . and came from nowhere?*

the

Monster who came from nowhere



by Kenneth Malone

THE laboratory was set far away from any town, in a cave that was almost invisible from the valley below, halfway up the black side of a bare mountain. Jonathan Scribe had turned away a great many journalists and a few hardy curiosity-seekers in the early days of his experiments. "You seem to think that if a man wants seclusion, he must be doing dangerous work," he had said. "There is nothing even remotely secret about what I'm doing here—except that you wouldn't understand it, and I couldn't explain it to you. And there's nothing dangerous about

the work either."

After a while, the journalists and the curiosity-seekers stopped coming. It didn't matter to them that Scribe was quite wrong.

But, then, Scribe didn't have any idea how wrong he was, either — for quite a while.

When a comparatively young man (and Jonathan Scribe was a far-from-decrepit twenty-eight) falls victim to the bite of an abstruse science, a great many strange things are liable to happen to him. He's liable to talk, as we have seen, a little more like a textbook than like a human being. He's liable



DERWIN

MONSTER WHO CAME FROM NOWHERE

to grow thin, through forgetting meals — and he's liable to forget meals, as well as sleep, appointments, hobbies and most of the stuff that preoccupies most of the human race, because his passion for science is as single-minded as a lover's for his one and only beloved.

It doesn't matter how small or insignificant his branch of study may look to the unimpassioned observer. To Jonathan Scribe, for instance, the notion of experimental proof of the wave-plus-particle theory of light, the "energy-packets" theory which, itself unsatisfactory, had effectively replaced two earlier and even more unsatisfactory explanations for the behavior of common light, was the be-all and end-all of his forgetful and passionate existence. If you had asked him: "What for?" or: "What's the good of it, anyway?" he would have stared you down with a look so bright, and so blindly puzzled, that you would have walked away with the feeling that you had met either a genius or a childlike fool.

Perhaps you had. His eyes, at any rate, were blue, and his hair was cornsilk yellow, and the combination gave him a childlike and naive appearance. The appearance was convincing enough, at any rate, to start the process that ended with Ellen Samson falling in love with him.

But that's a different story entirely.

This story is about what happened in the cave high up in the black mountain . . . and what convinced Jonathan Scribe that investigations into the nature of light are far from harmless.

Convinced him, as a matter of fact, very thoroughly.

Scribe and his laboratory assistant, an even younger young man named Walter who had the eager face of a cartoon pup-dog and the care and economy, in motion,

of a beautifully built robot, were the only human beings in the laboratory that Friday evening. The sun had gone down, and only neon lit the rooms with its eerie flicker. The thermostat read a cheerful 72 F., but Scribe felt an unaccountable chill in the night air.

He thought of asking Walter about it, and decided against doing so. He put the chill down to nervousness and nervousness, he thought, was only natural . . . After all, he was about to conclude the experiment group he had labeled Series III, a crucial series in his long-term plan.

He stood against one wall of the main room and looked down the rows of glass toward Walter at the other end. The glass was arranged in a kind of lattice design in three dimensions, carefully angled to provide delay-points, relay-points, refraction- and reflection-points throughout the maze. Light, passing from one end of the glass construction to the other, would be delayed, relayed, refracted and reflected according to a certain pattern, and the pattern might (or might not) indicate something interesting about the nature of light.

There isn't any sense in getting more detailed than that. As Jonathan had said, you wouldn't understand it, and neither would I. The glass glittered with a cold beauty in the neon light overhead. Scribe saw himself dimly reflected over and over, distorted by the semi-mirrors that spotted the lattice. He found that he was almost unable to talk.

At last he said: "All right, Walter," and Walter moved to snap off the main lights. Only the beam under test would exist in the room. The doors and windows were sealed.

Walter moved, snapped the main lights and put on the beam with one economical motion. But something had gone wrong; his shoulder had bumped against an edge of the lattice.

It had never happened before. It could never happen again. But once—and accident threatened the world.

Accident . . . or purpose.

The lattice shook with a steely clatter, like the sound of glass trees in a forest, shaken by the wind. In the darkness, Jonathan heard himself scream: "Wait . . . look out . . ." but, later, he didn't remember it. He heard the lattice shake again, and settle, and then the single beam of light went out and in the darkness there was a scream that was filled with pain and terror.

Abruptly, there was light. Walter stood near the switch. But between him and Jonathan was the lattice—and something else.

The lattice itself was twisted at an odd angle. He blinked but the lattice didn't move; it wasn't his eyes but the crystalline structure itself, distorted beyond imagination.

He couldn't look at it. It shook his nerves to stare too long at the glass structure that made no sense, and yet stood, and remained.

And, there, in the center of the structure, there crouched . . . something.

Scribe only saw it for a second, but the thing was burned into his mind. It was brown, about as large as a large bear, and shaggy. But what covered it was not fur; instead, the mottled-brown skin itself hung in folds over the limbs and

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MONSTER WHO CAME FROM NOWHERE

(Continued from page 42)

body of the thing. It had three limbs, each ending in a great reddish lobster-like claw, and its great head, lifted to stare, held an open round orifice that looked like a mouth, and three shining eyes without noticeable lids.

Scribe felt the shudder go down his spine as he stared; and then the thing, the monster, blinked out. It was as if a light had been turned off. The monster was gone—and Walter, at the other end of the room, screamed.

Scribe had been frozen for over a second, but the sound of the scream released him; he charged across the room, and bumped into one of the lattice-walls. It did not move; it never even shivered, but stood as still as death. Scribe went on. Walter was struggling in the grip of the mottled-brown monster, and shrieking horribly.

Scribe reached them, and tore at the flesh of the monster. It was cool and hard, like the skin of a snake, and he could not dent it. Walter screamed:

"Oh, God, it's tearing me—"

And the monster clawed at the man's body while Scribe battled it. At last he was thrown aside, casually, as if he weighed no more than the air itself, and Walter's shrieks rose, and fell, and died.

Scribe struggled to his feet and stared. There, on the floor, was a body he knew was dead, the body of his assistant. There was no doubt about death: Walter was bleeding from 50 wounds, and his neck was simply a mangled red skein of skin, muscle and nerve, with pulped bone shining whitely through. The lattice stood in the room without any motion.

The monster was—gone.

It had not left in any way Scribe could understand, not then.

It had simply disappeared.

HE REELED out of the room, and then out of the cave-laboratory itself. The bright sunlight seemed to make everything he had seen and experienced an impossible nightmare, but there was blood on his hands, and the slick cool feel of the monster's skin. He knew that Walter lay inside, dead, horribly mangled by a thing that had suddenly appeared out of nowhere as a simple experiment had begun.

The glass lattice wouldn't move.

That was his first coherent thought, and it meant something, but he couldn't discover what. Somehow, the monster had come from the lattice, from some arrangement . . .

And it had disappeared. Was it still in the laboratory at all?

Scribe had to think so. Localized so, he could think of the monster as an enemy he could fight, not as some supernatural horror against which resistance would only be futile.

And if the laboratory held the thing, there was one simple solution.

Fire.

Scribe barely wasted a second now. He found alcohol and matches, and sloshed them everywhere, over the lattice, over the body of his assistant, in the other rooms . . . and then he struck one match, and another, and ran sobbing and shaking from the sudden heat and flare of destruction.

He stood a distance away and watched the cave-mouth lighten and glow. The fire, he knew, would take hours to burn itself out; he did not wait for it. Instead, he turned and stumbled down into the valley.

He was not quite sane yet. What he had experienced had been enough to unstable the balance of his mind for more than a few seconds. His thinking was cloudy and difficult to manage. Ideas, visions (Walter: the monster: the glow of fire: the lattice) floated in and out of his mind like objects in a dream.

But he knew where he was going. There was only one place he could go.

ELLEN SAMSON, like Scribe, had money enough to ignore most of the facts of economic life, and strength and brains enough to ignore most of the demands of society. She lived in the city because she liked the city, and near the park because she liked the park. She followed no fashion; if she set a fashion by ac-

cident she immediately moved. She had no wish to be a sheep or a leader of sheep.

She was twenty-four years old, slim, raven-haired, and quite beautiful.

Scribe went to her because he had nowhere else to go. No person on earth would believe his tale of a monster appearing out of nowhere, killing a man and disappearing, winking out as if it had been washed off a slate. No one—except Ellen.

She, of course, was in love with him.

"Rest, first," she said after he had begun to tell her. "Let yourself relax. You've got to have strength—"

"There isn't any time," he said. He took a deep breath and there, in her apartment for the first time, he began to come back to himself. "The thing—killed Walter. Do you understand that?"

"Where did it come from?" Ellen whispered.

"I wish I knew," Scribe said. "Listen—we've got to do something."

Ellen put her hand on his arm. "A monster—from nowhere?"

"You believe me, don't you?" he asked suddenly.

"Of course I do," she said quietly.

"Of course I do. But—it just sounds so strange, that's all."

"Strange?" He would not have recognized his own laugh. It was a bark as hoarse as an animal's. "Walter's dead. The laboratory is burned. The thing may be dead—but only God knows what it can withstand. Ellen . . ."

"I want to help you," she said.

He nodded. "The thing's got to be killed for sure, once and for all. Ellen, we're going to have to go back there."

As he spoke the picture of the place rose up in his mind; the charred cave-mouth, the ruined rooms, and darkness . . . and somewhere, perhaps, lurking in the shadows, the brown thing that had killed once, silently, and would kill

again, for its own reasons, the thing out of nightmare that could not exist, but that, somehow, existed . . .

"We're going to have to go back," Ellen said.

"No. wait a minute . . ." He thought of the danger. "I'm going alone," he said.

"You can't," she snapped. "We—"

"One man can do the job," he said.

"Or the government," she said. "The Army—"

He shook his head very slowly. "This is my responsibility," he said, and his face was very cold. "Somehow—something I did released this thing on the world. If I can't get rid of it, for certain, now—than we need the Army, and all the weapons we can command. But first—"

"First, then," Ellen said, "we both go."

He tried to argue her out of that. But it wasn't much use. In an hour they were on their way out of the city in Ellen's car. At her insistence, he lay back while she drove toward the laboratory building. Once she turned to him.

"If something happens . . ." she began.

He said: "Yes?"

There was a long silence. Then Ellen said: "Nothing."

He never knew, then or later, what she had been going to say. Some sort of last will? Some expression of love?

The car roared on. Somewhere ahead, the monster waited . . .

THE LATTICE could be destroyed; Scribe knew that.

Even if moving it was impossible, the

thing was made of earthly materials. There was nothing supernatural about glass and lattice-work. Scribe tried to imagine what had happened, and what the immovable lattice had to do with everything else that had happened.

When the answer came to him, he stopped the car and sat in astonishment and fright.

"What's wrong?" Ellen said.

"I know what happened," Scribe said.

"The dimensional framework—"

"The what?"

"Walter jarred the lattice," Scribe said. "He moved it a little—just enough, and in just the right way, to make a tesseract of some kind out of the thing. A four-dimensional construction. The lattice wasn't a three-dimensional lattice any more; it was a tesseract, and so it provided a gateway . . ."

"Gateway?"

"For the thing that—killed Walter. The thing that's still up there."

Ellen shivered and said nothing. The air was growing very cold.

"And if that's true," Scribe said, and paused.

"What?" Ellen said after a long time has passed.

"If that's true," Scribe said slowly, "I don't see how we can kill the thing. I don't see how we can get rid of it. Certainly the fire didn't have an effect on it. All we're seeing is a shadow—a three-dimensional projection of a four-dimensional object."

"And trying to kill it—"

"Trying to kill it," Scribe said, "would be like trying to murder me by stabbing my shadow."

Ellen licked her lips nervously. "Then what are we going to do?" she said.

"We're going to try to drive it back," Scribe said. "I've got one idea left. If we can get it to go back through the doorway, and then destroy that—it'll be left in the fourth dimension. There won't be any way for it to get back here."

"If we can get it past the gateway," Ellen said.

"It's our only chance," Scribe said. "If that fails—well, I don't think even the Army will be able to do any good."

The car started again.

THE WINDING road led directly to the mouth of the laboratory-cave. Scribe stopped the car, and started to get out. Ellen held his arm.

"Wait . . ." she whispered.

"What's wrong?" he said, turning.

"Just a second," she said. He saw the fright on her face.

"Listen," he said. "Take the car and bring it down into the valley. You stay there. I'll be all right . . ."

There was a long pause. Then Ellen said: "I'm not going to leave you."

"Don't be silly," Scribe said. "You'll be safer—"

"I'm not going to leave you," Ellen said again. She took her hand off Scribe's arm and got out of the car. He followed her.

They went up the path to the mouth of

the cave and stood there for a second. In the growing dusk Scribe could smell the hanging odor of the fire he had started. It had burned out now, and only dry black ash was left. It was a long minute before he could force himself through the doorway, with Ellen behind him, and his footsteps sounded like an interruption of some extensive silence.

It was as if no human being had been in the cave for thousands of years. The sense of age, and of silence, had overtaken everything in the dark, charred corridors, suddenly, and without warning.

Scribe switched on his flashlight, and a beam displayed the interior of the first room. He found the door at the other end, half-off its hinges, and pushed through. Behind him he heard Ellen's footsteps, but he did not stop to look back. He was afraid that, if he stopped, he would be unable to find the courage to continue on. Instead, he continued through the winding corridors, and at last reached the room of the lattice.

Outside its shut door he hesitated.

"Is that where . . ." Ellen whispered. He nodded, and pushed open the door.

In the flashlight's beam the lattice sparkled! The glass, immovable, undamaged by the fire, shone with a glare like the sun itself. Scribe still could not look directly at it, even when he had reflected the flashlight's beam elsewhere and toned the glare down to something reasonable. It went in a direction his eyes would not follow. It was a part, not only of this world, but of another dimension, of the fourth dimension . . .

It was a gateway.

He moved toward it but made no move to destroy it. That would have to wait until the monster had been driven back.

The monster.

Scribe turned, but only Ellen was be-

hind him.

"Where . . ." she began.

He shook his head. Again the flashlight beam swept the room, and saw only glass and the charred walls. At the far end of the room was a charred lump and Scribe forced himself not to think about what that lump was, what it had been.

He walked a few feet farther into the room. If anywhere, the monster had to be here . . .

The silence hung over him like a sword. He waited for something to happen, and all that he wanted to do was run. There was a cold knot of waiting fear in his stomach. If the monster came, what weapon would he use? How would he be able to drive it back through the gateway to . . .

He remembered the claws and teeth of the thing.

For one second, he closed his eyes.

And Ellen screamed!

He whirled to see the thing advancing on her. A weapon . . . some weapon . . . was the first thing he thought of. But there was nothing like a weapon in the room. There was only . . .

A bar lay against the wall. It had been one of the metal bars used for the construction of the lattice. He rushed for it, picked it up and charged the thing. He found himself screaming.

Ellen struggled away and backed against the wall, her eyes wide and her arms held out before her as if to ward off the thing. Scribe came for it and the metal bar hit the thing squarely across the middle.

It turned to him, the teeth and claws moving, in absolute silence. Ellen screamed again as it sprang.

Scribe jumped away and parried it with the bar, knocking it to one side. In the corner of his eye he noticed that

Ellen had slumped to the ground. But he had no time to notice anything else.

The monster gathered itself again. Scribe used the bar to drive it toward the lattice. It sidled out of the way and swiped at him with its claws. Scribe felt the fire of their touch, and blood trickled down his left arm, but he had no time to spare for that. He swung the bar again and the thing backed off. It was silent (*can a shadow talk?* Scribe wondered fleetingly) and every motion it made was calculated to kill or maim. But Scribe kept forcing it into the lattice, farther and farther, using the bar as a weapon and a goad.

At last it was in the center of the glass network. Scribe pressed the attack, lancing at the thing with the bar. Once it was almost wrenched out of his hand; but he kept jabbing and jabbing.

This was useless, he thought suddenly. The thing was going to stay, and . . .

He jabbed 'empty space.

The thing was gone.

It had disappeared, retreated back into its own world.

And Scribe, suddenly, horribly laughing, swung the bar once more and glass crashed as the lattice shivered into a thousand tiny pieces of sparkling, shining glass . . .

"WE CAN'T tell anyone," Scribe said later. "After all, they wouldn't believe us."

"Of course," Ellen said. "But—"

"Your experiments—"

Scribe shrugged. "I'll start over again, then—somewhere else." He grinned unhappily. "And this time I'll be a little more careful."

"A lot more careful," Ellen said.

They came out together into the evening air. 