

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 2, No. 4

AUGUST, 1951

Superiority	by ARTHUR C. CLARKE	3
Prolog	by JOHN P. MCKNIGHT	12
Wilfred Weem, Dreamer	by ROBERT ARTHUR	15
A Peculiar People	by BETSY CURTIS	28
The Punishing of Eddie Jungle-Spit		
	by GARRETT OPPENHEIM	40
The Embarrassing Dimension	by H. NEARING, JR.	52
Solitary Confinement	by PHILIP MACDONALD	61
The Man Who Could Smell Land	by JOHN LANGDON	65
The Daughter of the Tree	by MIRIAM ALLEN DEFORD	74
Recommended Reading	by THE EDITORS	83
John Thomas's Cube	by JOHN LEIMERT	85
The Collector	by H. F. HEARD	93
The Rat That Could Speak	by CHARLES DICKENS	116
Cattivo	by ALAN NELSON	120

Cover illustration by Chesley Bonestell

(Space ship in trouble with meteor swarm; Europa and Jupiter in background)

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Volume 2, No. 4, AUGUST 1951. Published bimonthly by Fantasy House, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription, \$2.00 in U. S. and possessions; \$2.50 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. General offices, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. Editorial office, 2643 Dana St., Berkeley 4, Calif. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Concord, N. H. under Act of March 3, 1879. Printed in U. S. A. Copyright, 1951, by Fantasy House, Inc. All rights, including translation into other languages, reserved. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.

Lawrence E. Spivak, PUBLISHER

Anthony Boucher & J. Francis McComas, EDITORS

Robert P. Mills, MANAGING EDITOR

Joseph W. Ferman, GENERAL MANAGER

George Salter, ART DIRECTOR

In Basil Davenport's recent fine anthology, *GHOSTLY TALES TO BE TOLD* (Dodd, Mead), there appears a Dickens story, Captain Murderer, so delightfully grisly and so totally unfamiliar that we at once wrote to the editor for further information. Mr. Davenport, one of the Inner Five of the Book-of-the-Month Club and unique among America's more "respectable" men of letters for his profound knowledge of the fantasy field, replied, "Captain Murderer I owe to my habit of reading all of an author I like," and went on not only to give his source, but to add that we'd find another story for *F&SF* there. *THE UNCOMMERCIAL TRAVELLER* is a column-like series of essays, largely autobiographical, which Dickens wrote for his magazine *All the Year Round*, starting in 1860 and continuing almost up to his death in 1870. These collected essays (Volume XXIX of the standard *WORKS*) contain one item of extraordinary interest to the enthusiast of fantasy fiction: Chapter XV, Nurse's Stories. "If we all knew our minds . . .," Dickens writes, "I suspect we should find our nurses responsible for most of the dark corners we are forced to go back to, against our wills"; and certainly Mercy, nurse of the five-year-old Charles, bears no small responsibility for the darker side of the complex adult Dickens. But Mercy was not only a morbid sadist; she had, in the words of Andrew Lang, "obviously a true genius as a narrator," and the stories which her charge re-created half a century later must bestow on her a certain immortality. We advise you to read the whole of Dickens' account of Mercy and her narratives — and meanwhile savor this splendid tale of the consequences of an hereditary bargain with the Devil.

The Rat That Could Speak

by CHARLES DICKENS

THERE WAS ONCE a shipwright, and he wrought in a Government Yard, and his name was Chips. And his father's name before him was Chips, and *his* father's name before *him* was Chips, and they were all Chipseys. And Chips the father had sold himself to the Devil for an iron pot and a bushel of tenpenny nails and half a ton of copper and a rat that could speak; and Chips the grandfather had sold himself to the Devil for an iron pot and a bushel of tenpenny nails and half a ton of copper and a rat that could speak: and Chips

the great-grandfather had disposed of himself in the same direction on the same terms; and the bargain had run in the family for a long long time. So, one day, when young Chips was at work in the Dock Slip all alone, down in the dark hold of an old Seventy-four that was haled up for repairs, the Devil presented himself, and remarked:

“A Lemon has pips,
And a Yard has ships,
And I'll have Chips!”

Chips looked up when he heard the words, and there he saw the Devil with saucer eyes that squinted. And whenever he winked his eyes, showers of blue sparks came out, and his eyelashes made a clattering like flints and steels striking lights. And hanging over one of his arms by the handle was an iron pot, and under that arm was a bushel of tenpenny nails, and under his other arm was half a ton of copper, and sitting on one of his shoulders was a rat that could speak. So, the Devil said again:

“A Lemon has pips,
And a Yard has ships,
And I'll have Chips!”

So, Chips answered never a word, but went on with his work. “What are you doing, Chips?” said the rat that could speak. “I am putting in new planks where you and your gang have eaten old away,” said Chips. “But we'll eat them too,” said the rat that could speak; “and we'll let in the water and drown the crew, and we'll eat them too.” Chips, being only a shipwright, and not a Man-of-war's man, said, “You are welcome to it.” But he couldn't keep his eyes off the half a ton of copper or the bushel of tenpenny nails; for nails and copper are a shipwright's sweethearts, and shipwrights will run away with them whenever they can. So, the Devil said, “I see what you are looking at, Chips. You had better strike the bargain. You know the terms. Your father before you was well acquainted with them, and so were your grandfather and great-grandfather before him.” Says Chips, “I like the copper, and I like the nails, and I don't mind the pot, but I don't like the rat.” Says the Devil, fiercely, “You can't have the metal without him — and *he's* a curiosity. I'm going.” Chips, afraid of losing the half a ton of copper and the bushel of nails, then said, “Give us hold!” So, he got the copper and the nails and the pot and the rat that could speak, and the Devil vanished. Chips sold the copper, and he sold the nails, and he would have sold the pot; but whenever he offered it for sale, the rat was in it, and the dealers dropped it, and would have nothing to say to the bargain. So, Chips resolved

to kill the rat, and, being at work in the Yard one day with a great kettle of hot pitch on one side of him and the iron pot with the rat in it on the other, he turned the scalding pitch into the pot, and filled it full. Then, he kept his eye upon it till it cooled and hardened, and then he let it stand for twenty days, and then he heated the pitch again and turned it back into the kettle, and then he sank the pot in water for twenty days more, and then he got the smelters to put it in the furnace for twenty days more, and then they gave it him out, red hot, and looking like red-hot glass instead of iron — yet there was the rat in it, just the same as ever! And it said with a jeer:

“A Lemon has pips,
And a Yard has ships,
And I'll have Chips!”

Now, as the rat leaped out of the pot when it had spoken, and made off, Chips began to hope that it wouldn't keep its word. But, a terrible thing happened next day. For, when dinner-time came, and the Dock-bell rang to strike work, he put his rule into the long pocket at the side of his trousers, and there he found a rat — not that rat, but another rat. And in his hat, he found another; and in his pocket-handkerchief, another. And from that time he found himself so frightfully intimate with all the rats in the Yard, that they climbed up his legs when he was at work, and sat on his tools while he used them. And they could all speak to one another, and he understood what they said. And they got into his lodging, and into his bed, and into his teapot, and into his beer, and into his boots. And he was going to be married to a corn-chandler's daughter; and when he gave her a workbox he had himself made for her, a rat jumped out of it; and when he put his arm round her waist, a rat clung about her; so the marriage was broken off, though the banns were already twice put up — which the parish clerk well remembers, for, as he handed the book to the clergyman for the second time of asking, a large fat rat ran over the leaf.

You may believe that all this was very terrible to Chips; but even all this was not the worst. He knew besides, what the rats were doing, wherever they were. So, sometimes he would cry aloud, when he was at his club at night, “Oh! Keep the rats out of the convicts' burying-ground! Don't let them do that!” Or, “There's one of them at the cheese down-stairs!” Or, “There's two of them smelling at the baby in the garret!” Or, other things of that sort. At last, he was voted mad, and lost his work in the Yard, and could get no other work. But, King George wanted men, so before very long he got pressed for a sailor. And so he was taken off in a boat one evening to his ship, lying at Spithead, ready to sail. And so the first thing he made out in her as he got near her, was the figure-head of the old Seventy-four,

where he had seen the Devil. She was called the Argonaut, and they rowed right under the bowsprit where the figure-head of the Argonaut, with a sheepskin in his hand and a blue gown on, was looking out to sea; and sitting staring on his forehead was the rat who could speak, and his exact words were these: "Chips ahoy! Old boy! We've pretty well eaten them too, and we'll drown the crew, and will eat them too!"

The ship was bound for the Indies; and if you don't know where that is, you ought to, and angels will never love you. The ship set sail that very night, and she sailed, and sailed, and sailed. Chips's feelings were dreadful. Nothing ever equalled his terrors. No wonder. At last, one day he asked leave to speak to the Admiral. The Admiral giv' leave. Chips went down on his knees in the Great State Cabin. "Your Honour, unless your Honour, without a moment's loss of time, makes sail for the nearest shore, this is a doomed ship, and her name is the Coffin!" "Young man, your words are a madman's words." "Your Honour, no; they are nibbling us away." "They?" "Your Honour, them dreadful rats. Dust and hollowness where solid oak ought to be! Rats nibbling a grave for every man on board! Oh! Does your Honour love your Lady and your pretty children?" "Yes, my man, to be sure." "Then, for God's sake, make for the nearest shore, for at this present moment the rats are all stopping in their work, and are all looking straight towards you with bare teeth, and are all saying to one another that you shall never, never, never, never, see your Lady and your children more." "My poor fellow, you are a case for the doctor. Sentry, take this man!"

So, he was bled and he was blistered, and he was this and that, for six whole days and nights. So, then he again asked leave to speak to the Admiral. The Admiral giv' leave. He went down on his knees in the Great State Cabin. "Now, Admiral, you must die! You took no warning; you must die! The rats are never wrong in their calculations, and they make out that they'll be through, at twelve to-night. So, you must die! — With me and all the rest!" And so at twelve o'clock there was a great leak reported in the ship, and a torrent of water rushed in and nothing could stop it, and they all went down, every living soul. And what the rats — being water-rats — left of Chips, at last floated to shore, and sitting on him was an immense overgrown rat, laughing, that dived when the corpse touched the beach and never came up. And there was a deal of seaweed on the remains. And if you get thirteen bits of seaweed, and dry them and burn them in the fire, they will go off like in these thirteen words as plain as plain can be:

"A Lemon has pips,
And a Yard has ships,
And I've got Chips!"