

Weird Tales



MARCH, 1945

Cover by A. R. Tilburne

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The Shonokins

By *MANLY WADE WELLMAN*

LESS than five persons have ever seen John Thunstone frankly, visibly terrified, and less than two have lived through subsequent events to tell about it. Fear he knows and understands, for it is his chief study; but he cannot afford it very often as a personal emotion.

And so he only smiled a little that afternoon in Central Park, and the hand at which Sabine Loel, the medium clutched was as steady as the statue of Robert Burns under

which she had asked him to meet her. A few snowflakes spun around them, settling on their dark coats. "I say that you are in more than mortal danger," she repeated breathily. "I would not have dared recall myself to your attention for anything less important."

"I believe that," smiled Thunstone, remembering when last they met, and how he had demonstrated to her complete satisfaction the foolish danger of calling up evil

It is said that living Shonokins fear and avoid only dead Shonokins. . . .



Heading by *BORIS DOLGOV*

spirits without being ready to deal with them. Not one ounce of his big powerful body seemed tense. His square face was pale only by contrast to his black eyes and black mustache. Not even his restraint seemed overdone.

"Whatever you think of my character, you know that I'm sensitive to spirit messages," she went on. "This one came without my trying for it. Even the spirit control that gave it was in horror. The Shonokins are after you."

"I might have known that," he told her. "After all, I acted with what they might consider officious enmity. I stopped them, I hope, from a preliminary move back toward the world power they say they held before human history began. A Shonokin died, not by my hand but by my arrangement, and his body was buried at a place where I want them never to come—living Shonokins, it seems, avoid only dead Shonokins. Their very nature forces them to strike back at me. But thank you for the warning."

"You think," ventured Sabine Loel, "that I want to be your friend?"

"You do, though your purpose is probably selfish. Thank you again. Now, I never had any malice toward you—so, for your own safety, won't you go away and stay away? Avoid any further complication in—in what's to happen between me and the Shonokins."

"What precautions—" she began to ask.

"Precautions against the Shonokins," explained Thunstone patiently, "are not like precautions against anything else in this world or out of it. Let them be my problem. Good-by."

Going, she looked back once. Her face was whiter than the increasing snowflakes. Thunstone filled his pipe with tobacco into which were mixed one or two rank but significant herbs. Long Spear, the Indian medicine man, had told him how much such things did to fight ill magic.

THUNSTONE was living just then in a very comfortable, very ordinary hotel north of Times Square. He entered the lobby confidently enough, and rode up in the elevator without seeming to be apprehensive. But he paused in the corridor out-

side his own door as cautiously as though about to assail an enemy stronghold.

He bent close to the panels without touching them. Earlier in the day he had closed and locked that door from outside, and had dripped sealing wax in three places at juncture of door and jamb, stamping the wax with the crusader's ring he habitually wore. The wax looked undisturbed, its impress of the cross of Saint John staring up at him.

With a knife-point he pried the blobs away. They had not been tampered with in the least. Inserting his key in the lock, he let himself in and switched on the lights in the curtained sitting room.

At once he started back against the inner side of the door, setting himself for action. His first thought was that two men were there, one prone and one standing tensely poised. But, a hair-shaving of time later, he saw that these were dummies.

The reclining dummy was made of one of Thunstone's suits and a pillow from the bed in the next room. It lay on its back, cloth-stuffed arms and legs outflung. A tightly looped necktie made one end of the pillow into a headlike lump, and on this had been smudged a face, crudely but recognizably that of John Thunstone. Ink from the stand on the desk had been used to indicate wide, stupid eyes, a slack mouth under a lifelike mustache—the expression of one stricken instantly dead. The other figure stood with one slippered foot on the neck of the Thunstone effigy. It was smaller, perhaps a shade under the size of an average man. Sheets and towels and blankets, cunningly twisted, rolled and wadded together, made it a thing of genuinely artistic proportion and attitude. A sheet was draped loosely over it like a toga, and one corner of this veiled the place where a face would be.

"Substitution magic?" said Thunstone under his breath. "This is something that's going to happen to me. . . ." He turned toward the desk. "What's that?"

On the desk seemed to crouch a little pixy figure. Made from a handkerchief, like a clever little impromptu toy to amuse a child, it looked as though it pored over an open book, the Gideon Bible that is an item in every hotel room. Stepping that way,

very careful not to touch anything. Thunstone bent to look.

The book was open to the Prophet Joel, second chapter. Thunstone's eye caught a verse in the middle of the page, the ninth verse:

They leap upon the city; they run upon the wall; they climb up into the houses; they enter in at the windows like a thief.

THUNSTONE has read many books, and the Bible is one of them. He knew the rest of the frightening second chapter of Joel, which opens by foretelling the coming of terrible and ungainsayable people, before which no normal creature could stand. "They enter in at the windows like a thief," he repeated, and inspected his own windows, in the sitting room and the adjoining bedroom. All were closed, and the latches still bore blobs of wax with his seal.

These phenomena had taken place, it remained to be understood, without the agency of any normal entry by normal beings. Movement and operation by forces at a distance—telekinesis was the word for it, fondly used by Charles Richet of France, and tossed about entertainingly by the Fortean and other amateur mystics. Thoughts crossed Thunstone's mind, of broken dishes placed in locked chests by Oriental fakirs and taken out mended; of Harry Houdini's escapes and shackle-sheddings, which many persons insisted were by supernatural power; of how the living body of Caspar Hauser had so suddenly flicked into existence, and of how the living body of Ambrose Bierce had so suddenly flicked out. There were a variety of other riddles, which many commentators purported to explain by the overworked extra-dimensional theory. Somebody or something, it remained, had fashioned a likeness of his own downfall in his own sitting room, without getting in. Again approaching the desk without touching the Bible or the little figure crouched beside it, Thunstone drew out a drawer and produced a sheaf of papers.

The top sheet was a second or third carbon of his own typescript. Other copies of this sheet were sealed in various envelopes with equally interesting documents, placed here and there in the custody of

trusted allies, each envelope inscribed *To be opened only in the event of my death—John Thunstone*. The knowledge that such collections existed was a prime motive of some of Thunstone's worst enemies to keep him alive and well. There was Sabine Loel's warning, for instance. . . . Sitting down well away from the grotesque tableau, Thunstone glanced over his own grouping of known and suggested facts about the Shonokins.

Those facts were not many. The Shonokins were, or said they were, a people who had been fortuitously displaced as rulers of America by the ancestors of the red Indians. A legend which they themselves insisted upon was that ordinary human evolution was one thing and Shonokin evolution another. They hinted here and there at tokens of long-vanished culture and power, and at a day soon to come when their birthright would return to them. To Thunstone's carbon were appended the copy of a brief article on the "Shonokin superstition" from the Encyclopedia of American Folkways; a letter from a distinguished but opinionated professor of anthropology who dismissed the Shonokins as an aboriginal myth less well founded than Hiawatha or the Wendigo; and Thunstone's own brief account of how someone calling himself a Shonokin had made strange demands on the Conley family on a Southern farm, and of what had befallen that same self-styled Shonokin.

Finishing the study of his own notes, Thunstone again regarded the grouped dummies, which he had thus far forbore to touch.

The standing figure, with its foot on the neck of the Thunstone likeness, had hands that thrust out from under its robe. They had been made of a pair of Thunstone's own gloves, and on closer scrutiny proved to be strangely prepared. The forefinger and middle finger of each had been fucked in at the tip, so that the third fingers extended longest. The only Shonokin that Thunstone had ever met had displayed third fingers of that same unnatural proportion. Thunstone nodded to himself, agreeing that this was plainly the effigy of a Shonokin. He turned his mind to the problem of why the images had been thus designed and posed.

A simple warning to him? He did not think so. The Shonokins, whatever they

really were and wanted, would not deal in warnings—not with him at least. Was the group of figures then an actual weapon, like the puppets which wizards pierce with pins to torture their victims? But Thunstone told himself that he had never felt better in his life. What remained? What reaction, for instance, was expected of him?

He mentally put another person in his place, a man of average mind, reaction and behavior. What would such a person do? Tear up the dummies, of course, with righteous indignation—starting with that simulation of the Shonokin with a conquering foot on its victim's neck. Thunstone allowed himself the luxury of a smile.

"Not me," he muttered.

Yet again he went to the desk, and returned the paper to the drawer. He opened another drawer. Catching hold of the Bible, he used it to thrust the little handkerchief-doll into the drawer, closed and locked it in. Then, and not until then, he approached the two full-sized figures. They were arranged on a rug. For all its crumpled-fabric composition, the simulated Shonokin seemed to stand there very solidly. John Thunstone knelt, gingerly took hold of the arm of his own image, and with the utmost deliberation and care eased it toward him, from under the foot of its oppressor. When he had dragged it clear of the rug, he took hold of the edge of the rug itself and drew it smoothly across the floor. The Shonokin shape rode upright upon it. He brought it to the door of the empty sitting room closet, opened the door, and painstakingly edged the thing, rug and all, inside.

This done, he closed and locked the door. From the bedroom he brought sticks of sealing wax, which he always kept in quantity for unorthodox uses. After some minutes, he had sealed every crack and aperture of the closet door, making it airtight. He marked the wax here and there with the Saint John's cross of his ring. Finally returning to his own likeness, he lifted it confidently and propped it upright in a chair, and sat down across from it. He winked at the rough mockery of his own face, which did not seem so blank and miserable now. Indeed, it might be said to wink back at him; or perhaps the fabric of the pillow-slip was folded across one of the smudgy eyes.

A little quiver ran through the room, as though a heavy truck had trundled by somewhere near. But no truck would be operating in the sealed closet.

Thunstone lighted his pipe again, gazing into the gray clouds of smoke he produced. What he may have seen there caused him to retain his smile. He sat as relaxed and motionless as a big, serene cat for minutes that threatened to become hours, until at last his telephone rang.

"Hello," he said into the instrument. "This is John Thunstone."

"You danger yourself," a voice told him, a voice accented in a fashion that he could not identify with any foreign language group in all his experience.

"And you are kind to warn me," replied Thunstone with the warmest air of cordiality. "Are you going to offer me advice, too?"

"My advice is to be wise and modest. Do not try to pen up a power greater than hurricanes."

"And my advice," returned Thunstone, "is not to underestimate the wit or determination of your adversary. Good day."

HE HUNG up the receiver, reached for the Bible, and turned from the Prophet Joel to the Gospel of Saint John. Its first chapter, specified by the old anti-diabolists as a direct indictment of evil magic's weakness, gave him comfort, though he was reading it for perhaps the four hundredth time. The telephone rang again, and again he lifted it.

"I deplore your bad judgment in challenging us," said the same voice that had spoken before. "You are given one more chance."

"That's a lie," said Thunstone. "You wouldn't give me a chance under any circumstances. I won't play into your hands." He paused. "Rather unusual hands you have, don't you? Those long third fingers—"

This time it was his caller who hung up suddenly. Musing, Thunstone selected from his shelf of books a leather-bound volume entitled *These Are Our Ancestors*. He leafed through it, found the place he wanted, and began to read:

Stone-age Europe was spacious, rich

and uncrowded, but it could acknowledge only one race of rulers.

Homo Neanderthalensis — the Neanderthal Man—must have grown up there from the dim beginning, was supreme and plentiful as the last glaciers receded. His bones have been found from Germany to Gibraltar, and his camps and flints and fire-ashes. We construct his living image, stooped and burly, with a great protruding muzzle and beetling brows. Perhaps he was excessively hairy—not a man as we know men, but not a brute, either. Fire was his, and the science of flint-chipping. He buried his dead, which shows he believed in an after-life, probable in a diety. He could think, perhaps he could speak. He could fight, too.

When our true forefathers, the first *Homo Sapiens*, invaded through the eastern mountain passes or out of the great valley now drowned by the Mediterranean, there was battle. Those invaders were in body and spirit like us, their children. They could not parley with the abhorrent foe they found. There could be no rules of warfare, no truces or treaties, no mercy to the vanquished. Such a conflict could die only when the last adversary died.

This dawn-triumph of our ancestors was the greatest, because the most fundamental, in the history of humanity. No champion of mankind ever bore a greater responsibility to the future than that first tall hunter who crossed, all aware, the borders of Neanderthal country.

THE book sagged in Thunstone's hands. His eyes seemed to pierce the mists of time. He saw, more plainly than in an ordinary dream, a landscape of meadow and knoll and thicket, with wooded heights on the horizon. Through the bright morning jogged a confident figure, half-clad in fur, with his long black hair bound in a snake-skin fillet, a stone axe at his girdle and a bone-tipped javelin in one big hand. If the fringe of beard had been shaved from his jaw, he might have been taken for John Thunstone.

He was trailing something—the deer he had waylaid and speared earlier in the day. There it was up ahead, fallen and quiet and

dead. The hunter's wise eyes narrowed. Something dark and shaggy crouched beyond it, seeming to drag or worry at the carcass. A bear? The javelin lifted in the big tanned fist, the bearded mouth shouted a challenge.

At that the shaggy thing rose on two legs to face him, and it was not a bear.

Thunstone's eloquent fancy had identified the hunter with himself. It was as if he personally faced that rival for the dead prey, at less than easy javelin-casting distance. It stood shorter than he but broader, its shoulders and chest and limbs thatched with hair. Its eyes met his without faltering, deep bright eyes that glared from a broad shallow face like the face of a shaggy lizard. Its ears pricked like a wolf's, it slowly raised immense hands, and the third fingers of those hands were longer than the other fingers.

Thunstone rose from his chair. The fancied landscape of long ago faded from his mind's eye, and he was back in his hotel sitting room. But the hairy thing with the strange hands was there, too, and it was moving slowly forward.

Thunstone's immediate thought was that he had expected something like this. The Neanderthal man, says H. G. Wells, was undoubtedly the origin of so many unchancey tales of ogres, trolls, mantacors and similar monsters. Small wonder that such a forbidding creature had impressed itself on the night memories of a race. . . . It was not coming toward him, but past him, toward the sealed door. Its strange-fingered hands pawed at the sealed cracks.

Thunstone's pipe was still in his hand. It had not gone out. He carried it to his mouth, drew strongly to make the fire glow, and walked across the carpet to the very side of the hairy thing. When he had come within inches, he blew a thick cloud of the herb-laden smoke into the ungainly face.

Even as it lurched around to glare, it was dissolving like one scene in a motion picture melting into another. It vanished as the smoke-cloud vanished. The telephone was ringing yet a third time.

Patiently he answered it.

"You are now aware," he was told by the same accented voice, "that even your own thoughts may turn to fight you."

"Any man may dismiss his own thoughts," replied Thunstone at once. "I have a special hell to which I send thoughts that annoy me. Can you afford to go on blundering? Why do you not call on me in person? My door is unlocked."

"So is mine," replied the other coldly. "On the floor below yours. Room 712. Come down if you dare."

"I dare, and do defy you for a villain," quoted Thunstone from Shakespeare, who also made a study of supernormal phenomena. Hanging up, he took from his smoking stand a glass ash tray. In this he painstakingly built a gratelike contrivance from paper clips, and upon the little grate kindled a fire of wooden match sticks. When it blazed up, he fed upon it some crumbs of his blended tobacco and herbs, and when these caught fire he poured on a full handful of the pungent mixture. It took the flame bravely. He carried it across the room, setting it in front of the sealed closet. The smoke curled up as from an incense burner, shrouding the entire wall from any magical intruder. Thunstone nodded approval to himself, went out, down one flight of stairs, and knocked on the door marked 712.

The door opened a crack, showing a slice of sallow brown face. A deep black eye peered at Thunstone, and then the door opened. A hand with a too-long third finger waved as if inviting him in. He crossed the threshold.

THE room was dim, with curtains drawn and a single crudely molded candle burning on a center table. Three Shonokins were there—one motionless under a quilt on the bed, one at the door, the third sunk in the armchair. They might have been triplets, all slender and sharp-faced, with abundant shocks of black hair. They all wore neat suits of gray, with white shirts and black ties, but to Thunstone it seemed that they were as strange to such clothing as if they had come from a far land or a far century. The door closed behind him.

"Well?" he said.

The Shonokin by the door and the Shonokin in the chair gazed at him with malignant eyes of purest, brightest black. Their hands stirred, rather nervously. Their fingernails appeared to be sharp, perhaps arti-

ficially cut to ugly points. The Shonokin on the bed neither moved nor stared. Toward him Thunstone made a gesture.

"I guessed more correctly about you than you about me," he said. "Your languid friend yonder—would it be tactless, perhaps to suggest that he lies there without any soul in him? Or that his soul is upstairs, animating a certain rude image which I have sealed carefully away?"

"We," said the seated Shonokin, "have never been prepared to admit the existence of souls."

"Tag it by whatever name you like," nodded Thunstone, "this specimen on the bed seems to be without it, and worse for being without it. Suppose we establish a point from which to go on with our discussion. You were able to fabricate, in my room, a sort of insulting tableau. I, for my part, was to enter, be surprised and angry, and attempt to tear it to pieces. Doing that, I would release upon myself—what?"

"You do not know," said the standing Shonokin tensely. It was his voice, Thunstone recognized, that had given the various telephone messages.

"Oh, it might have been any one of several things that hostile and angry spirits can accomplish," went on Thunstone with an air of carelessness. "I might have become sick, say; or have gone mindless; or the cloth, as I loosened it, might have smothered me strangely, and so on. Strange you went in for such elaborate and sinister attacks, when a knife in the back might have done as well. You intend to kill me, don't you?"

He looked at one of his interrogators, then the other, then once more at the figure on the bed. That Shonokin's face looked as pale as paper under its swarthinness. The lips seemed to quiver, as if trying feebly to gulp air.

"I think that it has been well established," Thunstone resumed, "that when a body sends forth the power that animates it, for good or for evil, it will die unless that power soon returns. But this doesn't touch on why you dared me to come down here. Did you dream that I wouldn't call your bluff. For it was a bluff, wasn't it?"

The eyes of the two conscious Shonokins were like octopus eyes, he decided. The

Shonokins themselves might be compared to the octopus people, whose natural home was deep in ocean caves, from which specimens ventured on rare occasions to the surface when man could see and divide his emotions between wonder and horror. . . .

"Thank you for giving us another thought to turn against you," said the Shonokin in the chair.

THE dark room swam, swam literally, for to Thunstone it was as though warm rippling waters had come from somewhere to close over his head. Through the semi-transparency writhed lean dark streamers, like a nest of serpents, their tips questing toward him. At the ends furthest from him they joined against a massive oval bladder, set with two eyes like ugly jewels. An octopus—and a big one. Its eight arms, lined with red-mouthed suckers, were reaching for Thunstone.

By instinct, he lifted his hands as though in defense. His right hand held his pipe, and its bowl emitted a twirl of smoke. Smoke under water!—But this was not water, it was only the sensation of water, conjured out of his chance thought by Shonokin magic. As the wriggling, twisting tentacles began to close around him, Thunstone put his pipe to his lips and blew out a cloud of smoke.

The room cleared. It was as it had been. Thunstone tapped ashes from his pipe, and filled and lighted it as before.

"You see," said the seated Shonokin, "that any fancy coming into your mind may blossom into nightmare. Is it a pleasant future to foresee, John Thunstone? You had better go up and open that sealed door."

Thunstone's great head shook, and he smiled under his mustache. "Just now," he said, "I am thinking of someone very like you, who died and was buried at the Conley farm. Why not make him appear out of my meditations?"

"Silence!" snarled the Shonokin who had opened the door. His hand lifted, as if to menace Thunstone with its sharp nails. "You do not know what you are talking about."

"But I do," Thunstone assured him gently. "Living Shonokins fear only dead Shonokins."

"Shonokins do not die," gulped the one in the dark.

"You have tried to convince yourselves of that by avoiding all corpses of your kind," Thunstone said, "yet now you are in dread of this dying companion of yours. His life is imprisoned upstairs. Without it he strangles and perishes. I learn more and more about your foolish Shonokin ways."

"You learn about us?" snapped the standing one. "We are ancient and great. We had power and wisdom when your fathers were still wild brutes. When you understand that—"

"Ancient?" broke in Thunstone. "Yes, you must be. Only an unthinkable old race could have such deep-seated folly and narrowness and weakness. Do you really think that you can swarm out again from wherever you have cowered for ages, to overthrow mankind? Human beings at least dare look at their own dead, and to move over those dead to win fights. You vain and blind Shonokins are like a flock of raiding crows, to be frightened away by hanging up a few carcasses of your own kind—"

"I have it!" cried the Shonokin who had stood by the door.

Weasel-swift and weasel-silent, he had leaped at Thunstone, snatched the pipe, and leaped away again. A wisp of the smoke rose to his pinched nostrils, and he dropped the pipe with a strange exclamation that might have been a Shonokin oath.

"Without that evil-smelling talisman," said the seated one, "I leave you to your latest fancy—raiding crows."

The room was swarming full of them, black and shining and clatter-voiced. A whirl of many wings, a cawing chorus of gaping bills, churned around Thunstone, fanned the air of the room. Then, of a sudden, they were swarming—where?

"Now do you believe that your kind can die?" said Thunstone bleakly, his voice rising above the commotion. "The crows believe it. For they attack the dead, not the living."

THE crows, or the vision of them, indeed thronged over and upon the bed, settling into a black, struggling mass that hid the form that lay there.

"I thought on purpose of carrion-birds," said Thunstone. "Your power to turn thoughts into nightmares has rebounded."

He spoke to the backs of the two living Shonokins. They were running. He wondered later if they opened the door or, by some power of their own, drifted through it. He followed them as far as the hall, in time to see them plunging down the stairway.

Stepping back into the room, he retrieved his pipe and drew upon it. At the first puff of smoke the crows were gone, leaving him alone with the silent figure on the bed.

Now he made sure, touching the chill wrist and twitching up a flaccid eyelid, that the Shonokin was dead. He made a tour of the room, in which there seemed to be no luggage—only a strange scroll of some material like pale suede, covered with characters Thunstone could not identify, but he pocketed it for more leisurely study. Out into the hall he strolled, smoking thoughtfully. He was beginning to like that herb mixture, or perhaps he was merely grateful to it.

Back in his own quarters, he opened the sealed closet door without hesitation. On the floor lay a crumpled heap of sheets, garments and other odds and ends, as if

something had worn them and had shaken them off. Thunstone carried them into his bedroom, then dismantled the image of himself. He telephoned for a chambermaid to make the bed and a tailor to press the suit.

At length he departed to find a favorite restaurant. He ordered a big dinner, and ate every crumb with an excellent appetite.

When he returned to the hotel late that evening, the manager told him of the sudden death, apparently from heart disease, of a foreign-seeming man in Room 712. The man had had friends, said the manager, but they could not be found. He was about to call the morgue.

"Don't," said Thunstone. "I met him. I'll arrange funeral details and burial."

For a Shonokin corpse, buried in the little private cemetery on the farm he had inherited, would make that refuge safe from at least one type of intruder.

The manager, who knew better than to be surprised at Thunstone's impulses, only asked, "Will you notify his relatives?"

"None of his relatives will care to come to the funeral," Thunstone assured the manager, "or anywhere near his grave."



Not Beast Nor Man

FOR sometime we have pestered Manly Wade Wellman for more information about that "Myth" that may not be a myth, the one concerning the Shonokins.

Manly Wellman is taking his own time to reveal the sinister nature and macabre ambitions of the Shonokins through the eyes and experiences of John Thunstone.

However, he did pass along the following to us:

To those who have been kind enough to ask for "real information" on the Shonokins, I can only point to the very, very meager dossier that Thunstone himself reveals in the current account. The few beside Thunstone who have ever heard of the Shonokins by name are apt to dismiss them as a "myth."

The only people who know the truth about them died many thousands of years ago.

Our ancestors who fought before history's dawn against creatures that were not beast nor man settled the greatest war question of all time when they established the rule of their descendants on Earth—but whether they settled that question eternally remains to be seen. We know only what happened in Europe, the one continent where paleontologists have made a fairly thorough study of remains. What about America—Asia—other places where the beaten but perhaps not obliterated race of the enemy gathered and prepared—and may be now organizing for a return battle?

But if the Shonokins are dangerous, we are dangerous to them. Thunstone has fought no more than the early minor skirmishes before the decisive engagement.

Manly Wade Wellman