

# Weird Tales

ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

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D. McLWRAITH, Editor

# The Sixth Gargoyle

BY

DAVID  
HORN



Heading by J. R. Eberle

**T**HE tiny town of Veere sits snugly on the coast of Zeeland, huddled against the dunes which protect it from the harsh Nordzee winds. On the land side thick, serrated walls hide all but its rooftops and the tower of the Raddhuis which leans, ever so little, to the North, as if it had been bucking the gales for centuries.

A sea wall edging the harbor stands staunchly against the waves which come roaring in and, when halted by the huge gray stones, throw furious clouds of spray against the tiny houses that peep out over the quay. Stubby fishing smacks bob anxiously up and down and cluster together with squeals and groans, their nets blowing frantically from their masts.

The cathedral roosts on the hill, casting a benevolent eye over the village. It soars into the gray sky and sings minor liturgies to itself as the wind flies through its spires. Flying buttresses, crumbling with age, hang at its sides like town lace. In the cemetery sheltered under the south side of the cathedral are five graves, new, without headstones. Four of the graves are filled and show fresh mounds of earth. The fifth grave is waiting, open and expectant, for its occupant.

The fifth would be filled by morning, of that much Inspector Ter Horst was certain. Who it would be he could not say for sure, but the choice fell between two men—the murderer of the preceding four villagers, or the fifth of the murderer's victims. When the last gray light of evening dwindled and darkness and the north sea wind took possession of the village streets the choice would be made.

"It was a matter of practicality," said the gray haired Burgomeister, "to have five graves dug instead of only four." The old man leaned back in his carved chair and pulled thoughtfully at his chin. The smoke from the bowl of his churchwarden pipe trailed upwards towards the ceiling and lost itself among the blackened beams of the ancient city hall. Jonkheer van Berendonk looked as quaint—and as timeworn—as a

Rembrandt study. His silver chain of office, worn by ten generations of Burgomeisters of Veere, shone softly against the background of his black velvet cloak. Inspector Ter Horst waited patiently until the old man spoke again.

"It is true," the Burgomeister went on, "that we have only four dead at present. Still, if your theory is correct, by morning we will have five. It is cheaper, then, that all the graves be dug at once, and so did I arrange it."

"Yes," said Ter Horst, "Mynheer is right. By morning we will undoubtedly need another grave. What would I not give to know, who it is that will lie in it!" Ter Horst spoke vehemently, irritated with his own failure to catch the murderer and apprehensive about the possibilities of a fifth crime. An idea crossed his mind and he spoke again to the Burgomeister.

"Pardon, Mynheer," he said, "but what if both the murderer and the victim both die this night? Then there will not be enough graves to go around."

"No," the Burgomeister admitted, "but in that case, the murderer would have to be buried elsewhere than the churchyard—is unhallowed ground—so it was still cheaper to arrange the matter of the graves as I have." The old man, pleased with his logic, smiled as he bent over to light the two candles on his desk. The clock in the city hall tower struck five and both men listened intently until the last sonorous note died out.

"Then, if the schedule is adhered to," said the Burgomeister refilling his pipe, "the architect should be murdered next?"

**I**NSPECTOR TER HORST nodded. The schedule, he thought, would not be kept. It could not be kept. After all, wasn't he going to be at the architect's cottage, armed, on guard? And besides, he thought, it was impossible that any man could hope to complete a series of five murders, each a week apart, each but the first fully expected by the police.

Four killings perhaps. Certainly the killer

had had luck so far. But five murders, never. This time the criminal would fail and, in failing, become the occupant of the fifth grave. Inspector Ter Horst turned to the Burgomeister and, more to clear his own thoughts than to be enlightening, reviewed the details of the case.

"It is unthinkable," he said, "that this madman could strike once again."

"Imagine, Mynheer, even the shrewdest madman—for we certainly deal with a madman—being able to kill five persons in accordance with a set plan and still escape capture. Especially when his identity is known."

The Burgomeister raised his eyebrows. "You know who the man is?" he asked.

"In a sense, we do," said Ter Horst. "His name, of course, not. But we know he is mad—and that is something. Then, we know he is of a family that has been here since the cathedral was built. He is agile, enough so to baptize each of the succeeding stone figures with blood after he has destroyed their human counterparts. He is not, therefore, an old man."

The Burgomeister's wrinkled face arranged itself into a slight smile. He was amused at the way this policeman built up theories on nothing—houses of cards, he thought, that stood but a short time in the wind of reality.

Ter Horst continued talking, not noticing the old man's amusement. "A man of some education, I should say. Enough, at least to have made use of the records in the cathedral crypt. He must have traced records far enough to determine that each of his victims is a direct descendant of someone who helped construct the church. Our man knows Latin, at least."

The Inspector paused to light his cigar, which had gone out as he waved it about to illustrate his points. The Burgomeister got up for a moment to secure a shutter that had blown loose and was banging against the window frame.

"But this schedule," the Burgomeister asked, "on what is it based? How do you ascertain that the architect is next in his thoughts?"

"Ah," the Inspector chuckled. "A lucky

accident, that. Pure chance that we noticed a spot of blood on the forehead of the first gargoyle. Just in searching the cathedral for a possible fugitive did we see it. Then, of course, certain facts fell into place and forced a conclusion.

"Imagine, six gargoyles straddling a flying buttress. Six little stone figures climbing toward the spires of the church. An artist, an engineer, a stonemason, a bricklayer and an architect."

The Inspector stopped and lighted a fresh cigar with one of the candles. He spoke between puffs.

"One by one each is murdered."

"Except the architect," the Burgomeister inserted.

"Except the architect," Ter Horst nodded. But each of the others has been murdered, and in the order of his position on the buttress. Each man a direct descendant of, and in the same profession as, his ancestor who is represented in stone by the gargoyles.

"Imagine the uniqueness of the motive behind such a crime—if madness can be called a motive."

The Burgomeister leaned forward in his chair. "How," he asked, "do you know that the sixth gargoyle is the criminal? Why not, for instance, the fifth gargoyle?" With this he smiled laconically at the short, fat Inspector.

**T**ER HORST was not impressed by the idea. He deprecated it with a wave of his hand and, noticing that his cigar was out again, leaned towards the candles.

"It is," he said between puffs, "the sixth gargoyle because he is the only one who cannot be located. The first five are easily traceable. From the church records we know exactly who the first five men must be. And the subsequent deaths of the first five men must be. And the subsequent deaths of the first four hold exactly with our findings. Of the sixth gargoyle there is not a trace of information."

The Burgomeister settled back in his chair and mused to himself for several minutes. The crackling of the fire was almost drowned out by the wind's moan as it

writhed around the tower of the Raddhuis. The Burgomeister looked up sharply at Ter Horst.

"This sixth stone figure," he asked, "what does it represent? What sort of figure is it?"

Ter Horst gently stamped out his cigar butt on the tiles of the hearth. "The sixth gargoyle," he said quietly, "is the figure of a man committing suicide."

"So," said the Burgomeister. His tone showed a heightened interest. "Then we *are* perhaps dealing with a madman." The old man's huge dog lumbered up from the hearth. He stretched himself laboriously and then stalked over to be petted. The old man rubbed the dog's neck gently and the animal groaned in appreciation.

"And just what do you do now?" the Burgomesiter asked. "Is it necessary to wait until the architect is murdered to discover this madman's identity? Or do you wait until he kills himself, as he must, if your theory is correct."

"Two things I plan," Ter Horst said earnestly. "First, in the crypt below the cathedral, my men are pouring over the records to find any clue that remains which will point to our criminal."

"And if he has removed such records," smiled the Burgomeister, "when he made his own investigation?"

"Then," said Ter Horst, "there is a grave on the left side of the church, in unhallowed ground. Perhaps it may hold a clue, since it is, in all probability, the resting place of our original suicide."

"You would open the grave?" asked the Burgomeister. "There won't be much after four centuries."

"No," said Ter Horst, "but it is worth trying. If Mynheer would give his permission for such an act?"

The Burgomeister rubbed his leonine head, fingering the silver chain with his other hand. "I don't know," he said slowly. "It is an unusual request—and rather futile to search in any case, I fear. I would have to think it over. Besides, it is time for dinner," he said, noticing that his dog was nervously scratching at the door. "I will let you know in the morning."

"Of course, Mynheer," Ter Horst said, rising as the old man left the room and moved slowly down the stairs.

Ter Horst left the city hall and made his way over the slippery cobblestones to the architect's small cottage, just inside the city gates. The Inspector knocked and was admitted by the tall, thin architect who knew the stubby policeman from the past weeks of investigation.

THE host seated Ter Horst before the fire and took his coat. In a few minutes the policeman was nursing a glass of fiery Dutch "Geneva" and posting the architect on the latest developments of the case.

"As soon as we have the permission of the old Burgomeister," said Ter Horst, "we will open that grave. The Burgomeister is rather old-fashioned, you understand. He feels that it should be permitted only as a last resort, and we have to humor him."

"It is easy for old Berendonk to be conservative," the architect said with a smile, "where my life is concerned. Still, I don't think you would gain much in any case." He got up and went to a closet in the corner of the room. Opening the door, he drew out a raincoat and turned to Ter Horst.

"Since it is the night appointed for my demise," he said, "I feel guilty about wasting it in inactivity. Perhaps if we go to the cathedral I, as an architect, can help you in locating some information."

"If you're not nervous about going out," said Ter Horst.

"I will be less nervous if I am busy," said the architect.

On the slippery cobblestone road up the hill to the cathedral Ter Horst explained the circumstances of the crimes. He spoke loudly to be heard above the wind. Occasionally he had to repeat as he skipped along to keep up with the lanky architect.

"They were bludgeoned," he shouted as they reached the cathedral steps.

"What?"

"Bludgeoned, heads bashed in," Ter Horst said. They had stepped within the doors by now and his voice soared up into the roof of the darkened church. A policeman, on guard in the shadows, flashed his

light on them. Seeing Ter Horst, he saluted.

"We're going down to the crypts," Ter Horst said.

The officer nodded and stepped back into the shadows.

As the two men descended the stone steps to the underground section of the church their feet rang on the stairs. At the first doorway they were met by a young lieutenant.

"Ah, it's you, sir," he said, "I think we've got something."

Ter Horst introduced the architect. The young policeman showed obvious admiration for the man's nerve. "I can imagine you can make more sense from these documents than I can," the lieutenant said, handing the papers to the architect.

The architect took the sheaf of yellowed parchments and leafed through them slowly. At intervals he bent closer to scrutinize a poorly written phrase. Occasionally he muttered to himself. At the last page he chuckled and looked up at Ter Horst.

"You were indeed right, Inspector," the architect said. "Our madman has a unique motive indeed. It would appear that he, just as his victims, has followed the calling of his family—though how long this madness has lain dormant in his line no one knows."

"What do you find?" Ter Horst asked anxiously.

"This," said the architect, rustling the sheaf of parchment; "is the record of an unfortunate incident. It occurred during the construction of the cathedral, as you guessed.

"It seems that one of the casters—the men who made and installed the bells—went mad. Perhaps from the constant vibrations. In any case he jumped from the tower one day. Not necessarily a suicide, you understand—it could have been an accident. However the priest was doubtful. He called in the witnesses—an artist, an engineer, a stonemason, a bricklayer and an architect. On the basis of their testimony he decided that the man was a suicide. Of course, he could not then be buried in holy ground."

Ter Horst thought for a minute. "You

mean, our murderer now takes revenge for an ancestor who was buried without grace? Five murders for a madman of the sixteenth century?"

"So it would appear," said the architect.

AND even as he handed the parchments back to the lieutenant a stone, dropped from the ceiling high above, fell directly on his head and crushed his skull. The lieutenant had taken the sheaf of papers from a dead hand and before he realized what had occurred the architect was slumped on the floor with a widening pool of blood around his head.

The two policemen instinctively jumped back and then, seeing that the architect was beyond aid, rushed up the long stairway to the floor level.

The ground floor of the church was empty. No one could have passed out the door. Ter Horst ordered it locked and then beckoned the lieutenant and his men to follow him up the stairway into the spire.

The exposed steps were mouldy with age and slippery with rain. The wind's strength made going difficult. As they approached the level where the still intact buttresses leaned against the church wall, Ter Horst stopped.

Across the stairway was a rod about six feet long. At one end it had a knob. On the other was a bunch of feathers. The feathers were stiff and dark with dried blood.

"So," thought Ter Horst, "we are not dealing with such an agile man after all. He has baptized the gargoyles with a tipstaff's rod."

He handed the rod to an officer at his side and walked over to the edge where he could see the six figures on the buttress. The moon went behind the clouds at intervals. As he leaned over the edge it appeared again. In the pale light he looked down the row of figures to the sixth gargoyle. Standing on the buttress was a huge dark figure that looked like an oversized bat with its wings flung out.

As the moonlight came to full strength  
(Concluded on page 94)

## THE SIXTH GARGOYLE

*(Continued from page 38)*

Ter Horst could see the white haired old Burgomeister clearly. His silver chain of office hung around his neck, over the black velvet robe. The Burgomeister caught sight of Ter Horst and laughed loudly. His laugh got more and more intense until it shook his whole body. Ter Horst was about to call out

when the Burgomeister lost his footing on the slippery stonework and tottered.

He fell a few feet and then his body was snapped up sharply. Ter Horst saw that his chain of office had caught around the stone figure of the sixth gargoyle. As the moon went behind the clouds once more Ter Horst could see the figure of the Burgomeister swinging back and forth in the wind, his cloak flapping out behind him like the wings of a bat.