

« « « Gripping Tales of the Uncanny » » »

Strange STORIES

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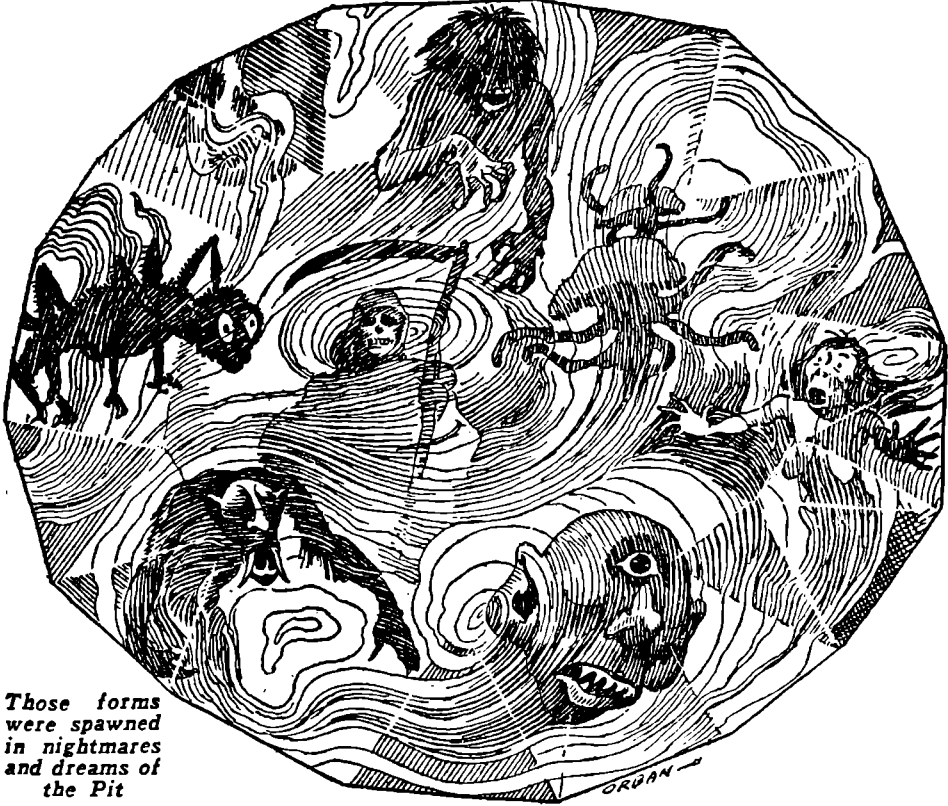
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*Eyes Focused on Infinity, an Artist-Scientist Beholds a
Horrific World Not Meant for Mortal Eyes
to Look Upon!*



*Those forms
were spawned
in nightmares
and dreams of
the Pit*

The Sorcerer's Jewel

By TARLETON FISKE

BY RIGHTS, I should not be telling this story. David is the one to tell it, but then, David is dead. Or is he?

That's the thought that haunts me, the dreadful possibility that in some way David Niles is still alive—in some unnatural, unimaginable way

alive. That is why I shall tell the story; unburden myself of the onerous weight which is slowly crushing my mind.

But David Niles could do it properly. Niles was a photographer; he could give the technical terms, perhaps explain coherently many things

that I do not pretend to understand. I can only guess, or hint.

Niles and I shared a studio together for several years. It was a true partnership—we were both friends and business associates. This was peculiar in itself, for we were dissimilar types, with widely divergent interests. We differed in almost every particular.

I am tall, thin, and dark. Niles was short, plump, and fair. I am naturally lazy, moody, inclined towards introspection. Niles was always tense with energy, high-spirited, volatile. My chief interests, in latter years, have leaned towards metaphysics and a study of occultism. Niles was a skeptic, a materialist, and above all, a scientist. Still, together, we formed an integrated personality—I, the dreamer; Niles, the doer.

Our mutual business association, as I have already intimated, lay in the field of photography.

David Niles was one of the most brilliant personalities in the domain of modern portrait photography. For several years prior to our association he had done salon work, exhibiting internationally and creating a reputation which brought him a considerable income from private sittings.

AT THE time of our meeting he had become dissatisfied with commercial work. Photography, he argued, was an art; an art best nourished by serious, solitary study unimpeded by the demands of catering to customers. He therefore determined to retire for a year or so and devote himself to experiment.

I was the partner he chose for the work. He had lately become a devotee of the William Mortensen school of photography. Mortensen, of course, is the leading exponent of fantasy in photography; his studies of monstrosities and grotesques are widely known. Niles believed that in fantasy, photography most closely approximated true art. The idea of picturing the abstract fascinated him; the thought that a modern camera could photograph dream worlds and blend fancy with reality seemed intriguing. That's where I came in.

Niles knew of my interest in the occult, knew that I had made a study of mythology. I was to serve as technical adviser on his subject matter. The arrangement pleased us both.

At first Niles limited himself to studies in physiognomy. With his usual thoroughness, he mastered the technique of photographic makeup and hired models whose features lent themselves to the application of gargoylean disguises. I handled the matter of checking over reference works, finding illustrations in old books of legends to use in devising suitable makeup.

Niles did a study of Pan, one of a satyr, and a Medusa. He became interested in demons, and we spent some time on his *Gallery of Fiends* series; Asmodeus, Azazel, Sammael, and Beelzebub. They were surprisingly good.

But for some reason or other, Niles was not satisfied. The quality of the photographs was excellent, the posing effective, the characterization superb. And still Niles did not feel that he was achieving his goal.

"Human figures," he stormed. "Human faces are, after all, only human faces, no matter how much you cover them up with grease-paint and putty. What I want is the soul of Fantasy, not the outward aping."

He strode up and down the studio, gesticulating in his feverish manner. "What have we got?" he demanded. "A lot of stupid horror-movie faces. Amateur Karloffs. Kid stuff. No, we must find something else."

So the next phase was modelling clay. I was handy here, for I had a rudimentary knowledge of sculpture. We spent hours on composing scenes from an imaginary Inferno; constructing bat-winged figures that flew against bizarre, other-worldly backgrounds of fire, and great malignant demons that squatted and brooded on jagged peaks overlooking the Fiery Pit.

But here, too, Niles could not find what he was looking for.

One night he exploded again, after finishing a set. With a sweep of his arm he smashed the papier-maché set and its clay figures to the floor.

"Hokum," he muttered. "Peep-show, penny-dreadful stuff."

I sighed, getting set to listen patiently to a further tirade.

"I don't want to be the Gustave Doré of photography, or the Sime, or even the Artzybasheff," he said. "I don't want to copy any style. What I'm after is something original, something I can claim as absolutely individual."

I shrugged. Wisdom had taught me to keep my mouth shut and let Niles talk himself out.

"I've been on the wrong track," he declared. "If I photograph things as they are, that's all I'm going to get. I build a clay set, and by Heaven, when I photograph it, all I can get is a picture of that clay set—a flat, two-dimensional thing at that. I take a portrait of a man in makeup and my result is a photo of a man in makeup. I can't hope to catch something with the camera that isn't there. The answer is—change the camera. Let the instrument do the work."

I saw his argument, and conceded its validity.

THE following few weeks Niles' existence was a frenzy of experimental activity. He began to take montage shots. Then he worked with odd papers, odder exposures. He even reverted to the Mortensen principles and employed distortion—bending and twisting the negative so that prints showed elongated or flattened figures in nightmarish fashion.

An ordinary man's forehead, under these methods, would register as being hydrocephalic; his eyes might appear as bulging beacons illumined by insane lights. The perspective of nightmare, the nuances of oneirodynia, the hallucinative images of the demented were reproduced by distortion. Pictures were shadowed, shaded; portions blocked out or moulded into weird backgrounds.

And then came a night when Niles again paced the floor, tracing a restless path through piles of torn-up prints. "I'm not getting it," he murmured. "I can take a natural subject and distort it, but I can't actually change its content. In order to photo-

graph the unreal, I must see the unreal. *See the unreal*—Good Lord, why didn't I think of that before?"

He stood before me, his hands twitching. "I studied painting once, you know. My instructor—old Gifford, the portrait man—hung a certain picture in his studio. It was the old boy's masterpiece. The painting was of a winter scene, in oils; a winter scene of a farmhouse.

"Now here's the point. Gifford had two pairs of spectacles; one sensitive to infra-red, the other to ultra-violet rays. He'd show a guest the winter scene, then ask him to try on the first pair of spectacles and look again. Through the glasses the picture showed the same farmhouse on a summer day. The second pair of lenses gave a view of the farmhouse in autumn. He had painted three layers, and the proper lenses each showed a different picture."

"So what?" I ventured.

Niles talked faster, his excitement increasing.

"So this. Remember the war? The Germans used to camouflage machine-gun nests and field batteries. They did it quite elaborately; painting the guns with leafy hues and using artificial plant formations to cover them up. Well, American observation posts employed ultra-violet lenses in field glasses to spot the camouflaging. Through the glasses the natural leaves showed up in entirely different colors in comparison to the artificially painted ones, which lacked ultra-violet pigment.

"I still don't see the point."

"Use ultra-violet and infra-red lenses in photography and we'll get the same effect," he almost shouted.

"But isn't that just an extension of the ordinary color-filter principle?" I asked.

"Perhaps. But we can combine them with reground lenses of various types—lenses that will distort perspective in themselves. So far we've merely distorted form, shape. But with both color and form distorted, we can achieve the type of photography I'm striving for—fantasy, pure and simple. We'll focus on fantasy and reproduce it without

tampering with any objects. Can you imagine what this room will look like with its colors reversed, some of them absent completely; with the furniture shapes altered, the very walls distorted?"

I couldn't, but I was soon privileged to actually see it. For Niles at once began another cycle; he experimented endlessly with the new lenses he brought in daily. He sent out special orders for grinding, spent time studying the physical laws of light, enmeshed himself in technicalities I cannot pretend to comprehend. The results were startling.

THE *outré* views he had promised me materialized. After a final day of effort before the camera and in the dark-room, we gazed together on a wonderful new world created right here in our own studio. I marveled at some of the effects Niles had created.

"Splendid," he gloated. "It all seems to tie in with the accepted scientific theories, too. Know what I mean? The Einsteinian notions of coexistence; the space-time continuum ideas."

"The Fourth Dimension?" I echoed.

"Exactly. New worlds all around us—within us. Worlds we never dream of exist simultaneously with our own; right here in this spot there are other existences. Other furniture, other people, perhaps. And other physical laws. New forms, new color."

"That sounds metaphysical to me, rather than scientific," I observed. "You're speaking of the Astral Plane—the continuous linkage of existence."

We were back again at our perpetual squabbling point—science or occultism; physical versus psychical reality.

"The Fourth Dimension is Science's way of interpreting the metaphysical truths of existence," I maintained.

"The metaphysical truths of existence are the psychological lies of *dementia praecox* victims," he asserted.

"Your pictures don't lie," I answered.

"My pictures are taken by recognized scientific means," he said.

"Your pictures are taken by means older than science," I replied. "Ever hear of lithomancy? Divination by the use of jewels. Ever hear of crystal-gazing? For ages, men have peered into the depths of precious stones, gazed through polished, specially cut and ground glasses, and seen new worlds."

"Absurd. Any oculist can tell you that—"

"You don't have to finish that one," I cut in. "Any oculist will tell you that we really see everything upside down. Our minds alone interpret the retinal image as being right-side up. Any oculist will tell you that muscularly, a near-sighted person is really far-sighted, and a far-sighted person is near-sighted."

I warmed to my theme. "Any oculist will tell you that the hand is quicker than the eye; that mirages and hallucinations are actually "seen" by the brain, rather than by the actual retina. In fact, any oculist will tell you that the phenomenon of sight has very little to do with either actual perception or the true laws of light.

"Look at the cat—contrary to popular impression a nyctalops. Yet men can train themselves similarly. Reading, too, is a matter of the mind rather than of minute perception. And so I say to you, don't be too sure of your laws of optics, and your scientific theories of light. We see a lot no physical laws will ever explain. The Fourth Dimension can be approached only through angles—science must concede that in theorization. And your lenses are cut similarly. It all goes back to occultism in the end—occultism, not 'oculism' or ophthalmology."

It was a long speech for me, and it must have astonished Niles, who glowered at me, speechless for once.

"I'll prove it," I went on. "Let me cut you a lens."

"What?"

"I'll go down to a friend of mine and borrow a few stones from him. There are some Egyptian crystals there which were used by the seers

for divination. They claimed that they could see other worlds through the angles of the jewels. And I'm willing to bet you that you'll get pictures through them that will make you forget experiments with Iceland spar and quartz and all the rest; pictures you and your scientific ideas won't so readily explain."

"All right. I'll call you on that," Niles snapped. "Bring me the stones."

SO THE next day I went down to Isaac Voorden's. I went with misgivings. The truth was that I had been half bragging when I had spoken about the properties of jewels and glasses. I knew that such things were much used for prophecy and various forms of lithomancy; but as to whether I could procure one, and whether it could be ground into a camera lens, I was not at all certain.

Still, I spoke to Isaac Voorden. He was the logical person to go to. His antique shop down on South Kinnikinnic, pervaded by an aura of mysticism, was a little fortress that preserved the past. Isaac Voorden made a profession of his hobby and a hobby of his profession; he lived on metaphysics and dabbled in antiques. He spent the greater portion of his time in the musty back rooms of his establishment, and left the care of his shop to a clerk.

Here in the rear of the place he had relics of other days which made his commercial antiques seem bright and new by contrast. The centuried symbols of magic, alchemy, and the secret sciences fascinated Voorden; he had gathered unto himself a collection of statuettes, talismans, fetiches and other paraphernalia of wizardry that would have been hard to match.

It was from Isaac, then, that I expected help in my quest, and he gave it to me. I told my story of Niles' photographic problems. The sallow-faced, thin-lipped little antique-dealer listened, his eyebrows crawling over his forehead like astonished black beetles.

"Very interesting," he said, when I had concluded. His rasping voice and preoccupied manner betokened

the introverted pedant—Isaac always seemed to be delivering a lecture to himself.

"Very, very interesting," he repeated. "David Niles has had illustrious predecessors. The priests of Ishtar sought in their Mysteries to peer beyond the veil, and they looked through crystals. The first crude telescopes of Egypt were fashioned by men who sought to use them in seeing beyond the stars and unlocking the gates of the Infinite. The Druids contemplated pools of water, and the mad emperors sought the Heavenly Stairway in China, hoping to ascend by gazing at turning rubies whilst under the influence of drugs.

"Yes, your friend Niles has an age-old wish, and expresses it in a timeless fashion. It is the wish that animated Appolonius, and Paracelsus, and the absurd, posturing Cagliostro. Men have always sought to see the Infinite; to walk between the worlds—and sometimes that wish has been granted."

I cut in. Voorden was wound up for the afternoon, but I wanted my information.

"They say there are jewels that hold queer visions," I murmured. Unconsciously, I adopted Voorden's pomposity of speech. He smiled, slowly.

"I have them here," he replied.

"Niles does not believe that," I countered.

"Many do not believe. But there is a stone once used by Friar Bacon, and a set of crystals which intrigued Theophrastus, and divining-jewels that the Aztecs peered through before the blood-sacrifice. Jewels, you know, are mathematical figures of light—they reflect within their facets. And who knows but that in some way those angles impinge on other worlds? Perhaps they reach out and transmute poly-angularity so that gazing into their depths, we become aware of it three-dimensionally. The ancients used angles in magic; the moderns do the same thing and call it mathematics. De Sitter says—"

"The jewel for the camera lens," I interrupted.

"I am sorry, my friend. Of course.

I think I have one that should prove eminently suitable. The Star of Sechmet. Very ancient, but not costly. Stolen from the crown of the Lioness-headed Goddess during a Roman invasion of Egypt. It was carried to Rome and placed in the vestal girdle of the High-Priestess of Diana. The barbarians took it, cut the jewel into a round stone. The black centuries swallowed it.

"But it is known that Axenos the Elder bathed it in the red, yellow and blue flames, and sought to employ it as a Philosopher's Stone. With it he was reputed to have seen beyond the Veil and commanded the Gnomes, the Sylphs, the Salamanders, and the Undines. It formed part of the collection of Gilles De Rais, and he was said to have visioned within its depths the concept of *Homonculus*. It disappeared again, but a monograph I have mentions it as forming part of the secret collection of the Count St. Germain during his ritual services in Paris. I bought it in Amsterdam from a Russian priest whose eyes had been burned out by little gray brother Rasputin. He claimed to have divinated with it and foretold—"

I broke in again at this point. "You will cut the stone so that it may be used as a photographic lens, then," I repeated. "And when shall I have it?"

"You young men have no love for quiet conversation," he rebuked me. "Tomorrow, if you like. You understand, the jewel has only a great sentimental value to me; I have never experimented with it personally. All that I ask is that you report to me your findings with it. And I counsel you that if the camera reveals what I think it will, you promise to take care in using it. There is danger in invading the realms—"

He was still chattering away as I bowed out. Great character, Isaac.

THE following afternoon I called and took the little package which he proffered me.

That evening I gave it to Niles.

Together we unwrapped the cloudy lens. I had given Voorden the specifications of the large camera we ordinarily employed in our later work—

a reflex, with a reflecting mirror set inside so that we could easily peer through and view the focus. Voorden had done his work amazingly well—Niles gave a little snort of astonishment before he commented, "Nice job."

He lost no time in changing the lenses and inserting the Star of Sechmet. He bent over the camera—I shall never forget the sight of him there—and his plump body loomed large against the shadowed walls of the studio. I thought of a stooping alchemist peering into a crystal to seek instructions from the demons that danced within.

Niles jerked erect with a grunt. "The devil!" he muttered. "It's all cloudy. Can't make any adjustment. The whole thing's a fake."

"Let me try."

I took my place and stared through a gray mass. Yes, it was merely a dull lens. Or was it?

A hint of movement in the cloudy gray.

A swirling, as of parted mists. A dancing light. The fog was dispersing, and it seemed to be opening up—opening to a view that receded far into the distance. The wall it was focused on appeared faintly, very tiny, as though through the reverse end of binoculars. The wall began to fade, so that I thought of a ghost room, with ectoplasmic lines. Then it fled away, and something new loomed large before the camera. Something grew out of empty space. Abruptly—focus!

I think I shouted. Certainly a scream seared across my brain.

For I saw Hell.

At first only angles and angles, weaving and shifting in light that was of no color, yet phosphorescent. And out of the angles, a flat black plain that stretched upward, endlessly, without horizon. It was moving, and the angles moved, and yet through the lurching roll as of a ship's deck in heavy seas, I saw cubes, triangles, mathematical figures of bewildering size and complexity. There were thousands of them, lines of light in the shape of polyhedrons. And as I gazed, they *changed*.

Changed into forms.

Those forms—they were spawned only in delirium; only in nightmare and dreams of the Pit. There were grinning demons that skulked on padding paws across that endless moving plain; there were shapeless toadstools with tentacles ending in Cyclopean eyes; there were fanged heads that rolled towards me, laughing; great hands that curled and crawled like mad spiders. Ghouls, monsters, fiends—the words sprang to my consciousness. And a moment ago they had been mathematical figures!

"Here," I gasped. "Look again, Niles."

HE gazed, his face reflecting puzzlement at my agitation. "Still nothing," he grumbled. But watching him I saw the pallor come into his face as he stared more intently.

"Yes!" he hissed. "The mist parting. Yes! The room is smaller, fading. And now—something is rushing up or I'm rushing toward it—angles of light."

"Wait," I said in a low voice, yet triumphantly. "You haven't seen anything yet."

"I see geometrical shapes. Cubic shapes. Polyhedrons of luminance. They cover a plain and— Good God!"

His body shook over the camera.

"I see them!" he cried. "I see them. Dozens of tall, eyeless creatures with heads all hair. Knotted hair, it twists and weaves, and underneath the hair, little wrinkled pink-pulp mouths like the convolution slits of the human brain. And that—the *Goat with the Hands!*"

He made an indescribable sound, fell back shaking, and turned the adjusting device. His eyes were red, he looked as though he had awakened from a fever-sleep.

We each had a drink. We didn't trouble about glasses, we drank from the bottle.

"Well?" I said, when composure had been restored.

"Hallucination," he hazarded, somewhat weakly.

"Want to look again?" I countered. He gave me a wry smile.

"It can't be delusion," I went on. "I didn't see any goat, but we both saw the mists swirl, saw the same plane, the same geometric forms of living light."

"True. But the last—things—were different to each of us. I don't understand."

"I think I do," I said. "If Voorden is right. That jewel is a key. Its angles open to the Astral Plane. The Astral Plane—here, don't shake your head so—corresponds to the scientific conception of the Fourth Dimension, although metaphysicians believe it is an extension of third-dimensional life. That is, when men die their souls enter the Astral Plane and pass through it into another higher form of existence on a higher dimension. The Astral Plane is a sort of No Man's Land existing all about us, where lost souls, and lower entities that have never achieved life, wander forever in a sort of Limbo."

"Hooey."

"A modern criticism. But it's an ancient belief, mirrored in a thousand forms in scores of religions. And wait until you see what I'm getting at. Ever hear of Elementals?"

"Nothing but a few mentions. Ghosts, aren't they?"

"No—forces. Entities not human, but linked with humanity. They are the *demons* and the *familiars* and the *incubæ* and the *genie* of all religions; the beings that exist invisibly around us and seek traffic with men. Organisms outside three-dimensional life, if you want it in more scientific terminology. They inhabit another Time-field, another space continuum that is nevertheless synchronized and co-existent with our own. They can be viewed, or reached, as ultra-dimensional inhabitants, only through angles. The angles, the facets of this jewel, enabled us to see through to them. They establish a focal point with infinity. What we saw, then, are Elementals."

"All right, *swami*, but why did we see different creatures?" he persisted.

"Because, my dear fellow, we have different brains. At first we both saw geometrical figures. That is the purest form of life they exist in.

"But our minds interpreted these figures into familiar shapes. I saw one type of monstrosity because of my background of mythological study. You received another impression—and I gather from your little comments (you look smug enough now, friend, but you were bleating pretty loudly a while ago and I know you were genuinely impressed) that you drew your images from past dreams and nightmares. I should imagine that a Hungarian peasant, peering through the lens, would see vampires and werewolves.

IT'S psychological. In some way that jewel establishes a focal point in more than a visual way. It must also enable those creatures to become aware of us—and they *will* that we see them according to our mental concepts of such entities. In fact, that's how superstition probably originated; these beings at times communicated with men."

Niles made a gesture of impatience. "Dropping the psychological and the nut-house angle for a minute," he said, "I certainly must hand it to your friend Voorden. Whether his story about the jewel is hokum or not, and whether your rather naive explanation is accepted or disbelieved, I still can see that we've stumbled on something quite marvelous. I mean it. The pictures we can take with that camera will be unique in the field. I've never read of any experimental work that even approached this. It goes beyond the wildest Dadaistic or Surrealistic concepts. We'll get actual photographs—but of what, I'll be darned if I can foretell. Your so-called mental concepts were different from mine."

I shook my head as something that Voorden had said came back to me.

"Now look here, Niles. I know you don't believe me, but you believe what you saw in the lens. I saw you shudder; you must admit the horror of those creatures—whether you choose to think they originate in your imagination or in my theory of the Astral Plane, you must recognize the fact that they are a menace to any man's sanity.

"If you see too much of that sort of thing you'll go mad. I'm not being melodramatic. I wouldn't advise looking too closely into that lens, now, or spending too much time before it."

"Don't be silly," Niles said.

"Elementals," I persisted—and you must believe this—yearn for life. They are cosmic ghouls, feeding on dead soul-bodies; but they long to lure a living man through the planes to them. Consider all legend—it's merely allegory. Stories of men disappearing, selling their souls to the devil, going to foreign worlds; all are founded on the idea of Elementals seeking human prey and dragging men down to their plane."

"Cut it out, it annoys me." Niles was colloquially common in his speech, but his eyes betokened a slight credulity that grew as I ignored his skepticism.

"You say it's superstition," I went on. "I say it's science. Witches, wizards, so-called wonder-workers; the wise men whose secrets built the pyramids—they all employed spells in which they used what? Geometrical figures. They drew angles and pentagons and cabalistic circles. Through the lines they summoned the forces from the Astral Plane—or the outer Dimensions. These forces granted them boons, and in turn they finally were drawn along the angles themselves into the Astral Plane, to pay for the boon with their lives. Witchcraft and geometry are strange bedfellows, but it's historical fact.

"And so I warn you. You see creatures through the jewel lens, and they see, feel, are in some way aware, of you. They will seek your soul—and just as you can look through the lens at them, they can extend their forces back through the jewel to suck you down. Hypnotic force, of some sort psychology has not yet postulated. Magnetism, telepathy; these are the words psychologists use to describe things they do not fully understand; just as the ancients called such forces magic. Don't look too long or too closely through that jewel."

Niles laughed.

"Tomorrow I'll take the pictures," he declared. "And then we'll see just what your Elementals are like. If it makes you nervous, you can stay away."

"Frankly, I will," I said. And I did.

The following afternoon I left the studio in Niles' hands. He was tremendously excited. He spoke of using new focusing adjustments to extend part of the field; he wondered what speeds to photograph with, what paper to use for printing. He also speculated as to whether or not the creatures he saw would appear on the finished negative, or merely the amazing light-figures. I left, for I felt growing nervousness and apprehension I did not wish him to see.

I went down to Voorden's.

THE shop was open, but the clerk was not there when I passed through the front of the place, although the bell tinkled its usual warning of a customer's approach as I entered the door. I walked back through the gloom to the room where Isaac usually spent his time in study.

He was sitting there in the soft haze peculiar to the lightless chamber; his eyes glazed in rapt attention on the open pages of some old book.

"Isaac," I said. "That jewel has something. Niles and I used it last night, and I think it's a gateway to something incredible. Those diviners of ancient times were no fools. They knew what they were doing—"

Isaac never moved. Imperturbable, he sat and stared through the quiet dusk. There was a little smile on his sallow face.

"You promised to look up some more of the jewel's history," I went on. "Did you find anything? It's amazing, you know; quite amazing."

Isaac sat and stared and smiled. I bent forward.

Sitting bolt upright in his chair, hand clutching a pen, Isaac Voorden, seemed a modern necromancer.

And like many an ancient necro-

mancer who had overstepped the pale, Isaac Voorden was dead.

Stone-dead.

"Isaac!" I shouted. Funny, isn't it, how people always shout the name of the departed upon discovery of death? It's a sort of despairing wail of disbelief at a friend's passing; an invocation, as though the echo of human voice can recall the soul of one that has passed beyond. Beyond—to the Astral Plane?

Quickly I bent over the cold body, stared at the crabbed scrawl covering the paper. I read the notes Voorden had been working on when his pale Visitor had arrived.

They blurred through my brain.

"The Star of Sechmet. Ptolemaic. Aug. Lulla, name of Roman who stole it. See note in *Veno's History*. Lulla died under curse for removing sacred jewel. Point one.

"Priestess of Diana who wore it in vestal girdle also died. For sacrilege. Again, see *Veno*. Point two. The pattern grows.

"Gilles De Retz—his fate is known. He misused the jewel. Yes, it's the inevitable story of violator—"

"See *Mysteries of the Worm* for Prinn's chapter on divination. Might be reference concerning jewel during its disappearance.

"Again, the Russian. Claims to have stolen jewel from Rasputin, who used it in prophecy. Rasputin dead. The Russian lost his eyes. And unless he lost his reason, his warnings concerning sacred character of the jewel are to be respected. Points three, four, and five. Whoever or whatever exists in the world opened up by the jewel is not anxious to have the gateway changed, or misused. Cutting the stone, transplanting it from one setting to another, misusing it—all result in death.

"And—I have done all three. God help this man Niles for what he must endure. They may get at him through the stone.

"God help me. There will be a price I must pay; soon.

"Why didn't I think before I gave up the jewel? Now I'm—"

That was all he had written. There

was no scrawling off of the interrupted pen, no frozen look of horror, no "mounting dread" in the text of the writing. Voorden had written it. One minute he was alive, and the next minute he was dead.

Of course it could have been heart-failure, thrombosis, or simply old age. Shock, excitement, anxiety might have brought it on; a stroke may have done it.

BUT I didn't fool myself. I knew. I rose and ran from that shop as though fiends dogged my heels. And all the way my legs worked in rhythm to a single phrase racing through my brain. "God help Niles."

It was dusk when I unlocked the studio door. The studio was empty, the twilight room darkened. Had Niles gone out?

I prayed so. But where would he go? He wouldn't abandon work. I walked to where the camera loomed; noted the exposure of one film. He must have been called.

I restrained an impulse to peer again through the jewel lens, as I lit the light. No—I did not wish to see that plain again; see those horrible figures dwelling outside laws of space and time, yet—mocking thoughts!—actually existing here around me, in this very room. World's within worlds of horror. Where was Niles?

I couldn't brood like this. Why not develop the exposed film? Keep busy. I carried the camera into the dark-room. Ten minutes in darkness, then the regular process. I set the fans going as I hung the dark square up to dry.

My mind teemed with excited conjectures. Would we find a blank photograph? Would it show the angled figures of light? Or would—wonderful possibility—the creatures conjured up by our imaginations appear? Would our own brains aid in taking the pictures, as a part of the focal point linked to the camera by the hypnotic jewel? It was a fascinating thought.

The fans hummed as the minutes fled.

But where was Niles? Whatever had caused his hasty departure, sure-

ly he would have returned by now. And he had left no note.

The door had been locked from outside, and I had the only key.

The thought grinned at me through a wave of horror.

There was no way Niles could have left.

Only one way.

I jammed the dried negative into the printer, with a sheet of ordinary paper.

I pressed down, slipped the print into the developer; waited a moment.

I raced out into the light of the other room, held the finished print, wet and dripping, to the light.

Then I screamed, and smashed that camera, stamped on the jewel until I could control myself sufficiently to pick it up and hurl it through the open window at the further rooftops. I tore print and negative to shreds. And still I screamed, for I could not and never shall be able to erase the memory of what I had seen in that picture Niles had taken.

He must have clicked it off at a very fast speed. Very fast. And perhaps it was the actual working of the camera which accounted for what had happened. It might have established the focal point instantaneously—established it so that those things—forces, Elementals, call them what you will—could achieve their goal.

I saw the print. It was as Niles guessed it might be; a picture of a black endless plain. Only there were no lights visible, no figures, nothing except black shadows that seemed to blur around a central point. *They* did not photograph.

But *they* blurred around a point—a central point. *They* got through just as the picture must have snapped, yet faster than light itself. *They* got through and drew Niles along the angles as I had feared. Faster than light itself, as I have said. For it had to be faster, else I would not have seen—I would not have seen what I did see on that print. The central point. . . .

The central point of that accursed picture; the only visible thing amidst the shadows—*was the dead and mangled body of David Niles!*