

# Weird Tales

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A MAGAZINE of the

BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XI

NUMBER 3

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$2.50 a year in the United States; \$3.00 a year in Canada. English office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeant's Inn, Fleet Street, E. C. 4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 450 East Ohio Street, Chicago, Ill. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.  
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# Folks Used to Believe

by ALVIN F.  
HARLOW

## The Vampire



**I**N South America there are blood-sucking bats which have been known to attack horses and cattle and even man in his sleep. They are called vampires because their taste is supposed to resemble that of those hideous, demoniac creatures of Slavic fable—a belief in which still persists in many regions of eastern and southeastern Europe.

One theory is that the soul of a living person, usually a sorcerer, leaves the body while asleep, and in the form of a bit of straw or fluff of down, slips through keyholes, attacks sleeping victims and sucks their blood. If the sleeper should waken in time to clutch this tiny soul-embodiment, he may injure or kill the vampire thus. But the most general form of the belief is that the vampire is a dead wizard, witch, werewolf, suicide or one cursed by his parents or the church. Even an innocent man might become a vampire after death if he had fallen victim to another vampire, or if a cat or bird crossed his dead body before burial. In some countries such a cat was at once killed. Such bodies do not decay in the grave; if you open the coffin, you are apt to find the body turned on its side, the eyes staring, cheeks flushed, skin firm, hair and nails still growing.

At night the vampire rises and goes forth to suck the blood of living per-

sons, who thereupon pine, waste away and die. He can only be laid to rest by a stake (in Russia it must be of aspen) driven through his heart. Only in 1825 was this custom abolished by law in England. In some neighborhoods the supposed vampire's corpse is dug up and beheaded.

Some claim that the vampire feeds only on children's blood. Sometimes when the vampire first awakes in the grave after death, he begins to gnaw his own hands or feet and chew his shroud, causing his kindred to sicken and die. Many vampires devour only the hearts of their victims; others steal the hearts out of their victims' bodies and substitute therefor the heart of a cock or rabbit. The stolen heart they expose over a magic fire, which creates hopeless love-longings in the victim. This is where we get our romantic phrases about stealing or losing the heart when in love.

In modern Bulgaria a magician armed with a saint's picture is sometimes sent to lure a vampire into a bottle in which is some of the filthy food which a vampire loves; the bottle is then quickly corked and thrown into the fire, and the vampire dies. In some neighborhoods a man with heavy eyebrows meeting over his nose, "as if his soul were taking flight like a butterfly to enter some dead body," was liable to be suspected of being either a vampire or a werewolf.