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Contents for August, 1928

Cover Design	C. C. Senf
Illustrating a scene in "Red Shadows"	
Black Mora	A. Leslie 148
Verse; decoration by Hugh Rankin	
Red Shadows	Robert E. Howard 149
Thrilling adventures and blood-freezing perils—red shadows on black trails—savage witchcraft and the Black God	
You Can't Kill a Ghost	Frank Belknap Long, Jr. 165
An eery ghost-tale of Haiti—a weird adventure in a ruthless land, in which a phantom is the hero	
Vulture Crag	Everil Worrell 171
A weird-scientific tale of projection to other planets, by the author of "The Bird of Space" and "Cattle of Furos"	
The Rose Window	Charlton Lawrence Edholm 187
Back in the old town of Tuebingen a futile murder took place—a tale of treachery, superstition, and reincarnation	

[CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE]

[CONTINUED FROM PRECEDING PAGE]

Crashing Suns (Part 1)	Edmond Hamilton	193
<i>A two-part tale of a hundred thousand years in the future—when our universe is threatened with destruction</i>		
The Man in the Green Coat	Eli Colter	215
<i>A fascinating story of the supernatural, in the best vein of this well-known author</i>		
Sonnets of the Midnight Hours:		
5. The Grip of Evil Dream	Donald Wandrei	231
<i>Verse; decoration by Hugh Rankin</i>		
The Witches' Sabbath (Conclusion)	Stephen Bagby	232
<i>A two-part serial story of devil-worship, witchcraft, and the Black Mass</i>		
Dirge	Leavenworth Macnab	252
<i>Verse</i>		
The Vengeance of Nitocris	Thomas Lanier Williams	253
<i>Weird revenge was taken by the sister of the Pharaoh on those who had murdered him—a true story of old Egypt</i>		
Three Poems in Prose	Charles Baudelaire	261
<i>Translated by Clark Ashton Smith from the French</i>		
Folks Used to Believe:		
Wonderfully Preserved Relics	Alvin F. Harlow	263
<i>Strange beliefs regarding the relics of the saints</i>		
The Justice of the Czar	George Fielding Eliot	264
<i>A grim tale of torture in the prisons of the Czar Peter the Great—and the fate suffered by the executioner</i>		
Weird Story Reprint:		
The Demoiselle D'Ys	Robert W. Chambers	268
<i>A strange tale of reincarnation, and falconry, and the love of a stranger for a Norman maid</i>		
The Eyrie		278
<i>A chat with the readers</i>		

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Three Poems in Prose

By CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

(Translated by Clark Ashton Smith)

Une Charogne

REMEMBER, my soul, the thing we saw on that beautiful morning of sweet summer: beside the path an infamous carrion on a couch sown with pebbles, its legs in the air like a lascivious woman burning and sweating her poisons, laid open in a cynical and nonchalant manner its belly filled with exhalations.

The sun shone down upon this putrefaction, as if to cook it to a turn, and render back a hundredfold to great nature all that she had joined together; and the sky saw the superb carcass unfold like a flower. The fetor was so powerful that you believed you would swoon on the grass.

The flies hummed on the putrid belly, where issued black battalions of larvæ that flowed along these living tatters like a thick liquid. All these descended and mounted like a wave, or darted forth in sparklings; one would have said the body lived and multiplied, swollen by a vague breath. And this world gave forth a strange music, as of wind and running water, or the grain that a winnower agitates and turns with his fan in rhythmic movements.

The forms withdrew and faded, and were no more than a dream, an outline that is slow to arrive on the forgetful canvas, and is finished by the artist from memory alone.

Behind the rocks a restless bitch regarded us with an angry eye, watching for the moment to retrieve from the skeleton a morsel she had let fall.

—And still you will be like this ordure, this horrible infection, star of my eyes, and sun of my being, you, my angel and my passion! Yes, such

you will be, O queen of graces, after
the final sacraments, when you have
gone, beneath the grass and the rich
flowers, to mold among the bones of
the dead.

Then, O my beauty! say to the
worms who will devour you with
kisses, that I have kept in memory the
form and the divine essence of my
decomposed loves!
