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## Contents for July, 1926

Cover Design .....	E. M. Stevenson	
<i>Illustrating a Scene from "Through the Vortex"</i>		
Through the Vortex.....	Donald Edward Keyhoe	5
<i>Scaring Thrill-tale About One Who Was Sucked Through the Vortex Into a Murky Land of Terrible Beasts and Green-hued Men</i>		
Fettered (Part 1).....	Greye La Spina	27
<i>A Tale of Midnight Horror—Occult Evil that Drew its Chains About Two Men and Two Women in the Northern Woods</i>		
Laocoon .....	Bassett Morgan	49
<i>Weird Surgery—Great Sea-dragons—the Fate of Chueng Ching the Leper—and the Dread that Fell Upon Willoughby</i>		
Si Urag of the Tail.....	Oscar Cook	57
<i>Terrific Story of a Man-eating Orchid in the Wilds of Borneo—Mystery Tale of Eery Adventures in the Jungle</i>		

(Continued on Next Page)

(Continued from Preceding Page)

- With the Coming of Dawn**-----**Leslie N. Johnson** 67  
*Five-minute Story—Dr. Blas Was Firmly Resolved that Never  
Would he Allow Himself to be Hanged*
- The Demons of Castle Romnare**.....**Elizabeth Adt Wenzler** 69  
*The Very Atmosphere of Old Lorraine Breathes Through this Fascinating  
Story of Ghosts and Dark Magic*
- The House of Horror**-----**Seabury Quinn** 77  
*De Grandin Goes Down Into the Gruesome Cellars Beneath that  
Abode of Abominations, and Shudders at What he Finds There*
- The Dreamer of Atlanaat**-----**E. Hoffmann Price** 91  
*An Oriental of Strange Thrills—the Lord of the World, and the  
Fierce Sultan of Angor-lana*
- Fear** -----**Cristel Hastings** 101  
*Verse*
- Weird Story Reprints**
- No. 13. The Birthmark**-----**Nathaniel Hawthorne** 102  
*A Tiny Hand Clutched Georgiana's Cheek, and her Husband Tried  
to Tear it Out by Means of his Scientific Knowledge*
- A Runaway World** -----**Clare Winger Harris** 113  
*Our Earth, an Infinitesimal Electron in the Vast Cosmos, Is Sub-  
jected to a Dire Chemical Experiment*
- Salem** -----**Edmund Clarence Stedman** 125  
*Verse*
- The Elixir of Life**...**Marc R. Schorer & August W. Derleth** 126  
*One Ingredient Was Needed to Compound the Potion Which Should  
Restore the Duke's Health—And Terribly Did the Duke Pay*
- Ghosts** -----**Louise Garwood** 128  
*Verse*
- The Devil-Ray (Conclusion)**-----**Joel Martin Nichols, Jr.** 129  
*Three-part Serial About a Purple Beam of Light Which Instantly  
Slew Every Living Thing that it Touched*
- The Eyrie** -----**138**  
*A Chat With the Readers*

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# WITH *the* COMING of DAWN

By LESLIE N. JOHNSON

**A**LL was quiet in the death chamber; the guard trod the narrow strip of carpet that ran around the death cell carefully, lest he awaken from his fitful slumbers the figure sprawled in the roll of blankets on the small cot within. From somewhere in the building came the muffled booming of a clock. It was midnight.

Dr. Blaas, convicted murderer, stirred; quickly he jumped to his feet and rushed to the steel bars that separated him from the guard.

"What time is it, guard?" he asked, excitedly.

"Just midnight," the guard answered, noting the bloodless fingers that encircled the bars in a viselike grip.

A relieved expression fell upon the pallid face at the words; the nervous play of facial muscles was momentarily halted, and the man sank into the scarred chair beside the little table.

"Six hours!" he muttered. "Six hours!"

The words died away in a harsh whisper as his head dropped between his outspread arms. Limply he sat there, until the twitching body and

labored breathing told of the tempest of his emotions. With a sudden wild cry, he leapt to his feet, his eyes wide with a maniacal fury.

"They shall not—they *shall* not hang me!" he shouted at the top of his voice. He threw himself against the wooden bars; beat upon them with clenched fists; cried out hoarsely at the futility of it all. Spent, he fell sobbing to the floor, and grew quiet in the arms of blessed unconsciousness.

**T**HE changing of the guard aroused the condemned man.

"What time is it, guard?" he asked, anxiously. He was quiet now, but his face was set with the rigidity of marble and his eyes gleamed with a new light—a light of triumph and fixed purpose.

"Five o'clock."

"It's nearly time," muttered the prisoner. "Guard, may I have a pencil and paper?"

"You may have anything you want, within reason—that's the law," the guard answered as he turned into the little anteroom.

Hastily Dr. Blaas wrote—wrote until his eyes went to the window of the chamber and he beheld the first streaks of the coming dawn. His nerveless fingers relaxed their hold and the pencil clattered on the uncovered table-top as the doctor stared at the breaking day.

"It's daylight!" gasped the prisoner, incredulously, and his eyes fell to the single sentence he had written:

"Rather would I die by my own hand, proclaiming my innocence, than die on the scaffold, and be regarded as guilty."

With a sudden gesture of decision, he turned to the sentry.

"May I have a glass of water?"

As the guard disappeared into the anteroom, Dr. Blaas took hold of the large stone in his ring—the ring the warden, as a last concession, had allowed him to wear into the death cell—unscrewed the top, and, from the cavity under the stone, removed a small white pellet. With the water, he swallowed it.

"I thank you for this last courtesy, guard. I'm going to lie down now. Good-bye."

Silently the guard grasped the slim, cold fingers extended between the bars and turned away with a strange tightening of his throat muscles as the condemned man rolled into his blankets.

**T**HE ringing of the telephone broke the silence of the death chamber—the telephone that was connected with the warden's office. Into the anteroom dashed the guard, to emerge with a happy shout.

"Dr. Blaas, they have granted you a reprieve—you are to have a new trial! Dr. Blaas, wake up!" cried the guard.

The figure on the cot remained quiet and still, and the guard, on entering, found Dr. Blaas beyond the reach of human voice, a ghastly, triumphant smile frozen on his dead lips.

