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# Weird Tales

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# HYDRA

By  
HENRY KUTTNER

First published *Weird Tales*, April 1939.

*A unique tale of the fourth dimension, a dangerous experiment in occultism, and the ghastly horror that reached back from that other plane of space*

“There are sacraments of evil as well as of good about us, and we live and move to my belief in an unknown world, a place where there are caves and shadows and dwellers in twilight. It is possible that man may sometimes return on the track of evolution, and it is my belief that an awful lore is not yet dead.”

—ARTHUR MACHEN.

Two men died; possibly three. So much is known. The tabloids ran flaming headlines telling of the mysterious mutilation and death of Kenneth Scott, noted Baltimore author and occultist, and later, they capitalized similarly on the disappearance of Robert Ludwig, whose correspondence with Scott was well known in literary circles. The equally strange and even more ghastly death of Paul Edmond, while separated from the scene of the Scott horror by the width of a continent, was clearly connected with it. This was shown by the presence of a certain much-discussed object which was found clutched in Edmond's rigid hands—and which the credulous claim caused his death. While this solution is improbable, it is nevertheless true that Paul Edmond bled to death because his carotid artery was severed, and it is also true that there are features about the case difficult to explain in the light of present-day science.

The tabloids made a great deal of Edmond's diary, and even conventional papers found it difficult to handle that unusual document in a fashion that would not lay them open to the charge of yellow journalism. The Hollywood *Citizen-News* solved the problem for its contemporaries by quoting the least fantastic portions of the diary, and hinting plainly that Edmond had been a fiction writer, and that the man's notes had never been intended as a truthful summary of events. The privately printed pamphlet, *On the Sending Out of the Soul*, which played so important a part in the diary, seems to be of purely fictional origin. None of the local booksellers has heard of it, and Mr. Russell Hodgkins, California's most noted bibliophile, declares that the title and the volume must have originated in the mind of the ill-fated Paul Edmond.

Yet, according to Edmond's diary and certain other papers and letters discovered in his desk, it was this pamphlet which caused Ludwig and Edmond to undertake the disastrous experiment. Ludwig had decided to visit his California correspondent, making a leisurely voyage from New York by way of the Panama Canal. The *Carnatic* docked on August 15th, and Ludwig spent several hours wandering through San Pedro. It was there, in a musty “swap shop,” that he bought the pamphlet, *On the Sending Out of the Soul*. When the young man arrived at Edmond's Hollywood apartment he had the booklet with him.

Both Ludwig and Edmond were deeply interested in the occult. They had dabbled in witchcraft and demonology, as a result of their acquaintance with Scott, who possessed one of the best occult libraries in America.

Scott was a strange man. Slender, sharp-eyed, and taciturn, he spent most of his time in an old brownstone house in Baltimore. His knowledge of esoteric matters was little short of phenomenal; he had read the *Chhaya Ritual*, and in his letters to Ludwig and Edmond had hinted at the real meanings behind the veiled hints and warnings in that half-legendary manuscript. In his great library were such names as Sinistrasi, Zancherius, and the ill-famed Gougenot des Mousseau; and in his library safe he had, it was rumored, an immense scrapbook filled with excerpts copied from such fantastic sources as the *Book of Karnak*, the monstrous Sixtystone, and the blasphemous Elder Key, of which only two copies are reputed to exist on earth.

It was little wonder, therefore, that the two students were anxious to tear aside the veil and view the astounding mysteries of which Scott hinted so cautiously. In his diary Edmond confessed that his own curiosity was the direct cause of the tragedy.

Yet it was Ludwig who bought the booklet and pored over it with Edmond in the latter's apartment. Certainly Edmond described the pamphlet plainly enough, and it is strange, therefore, that no bibliophile could identify it. According to the diary, it was quite small, about four by five inches, bound in coarse brown paper, and yellowed and crumbling with age. The printing—in Eighteenth Century type with the long *s*—was crudely done, and there was neither a date-line nor a publisher's imprint. There were eight pages; seven of them filled with what Edmond called the usual banal sophisms of mysticism, and on the last page were the specific directions for what would nowadays be known as "projecting one's astral."

The general process was familiar to both students. Their researches had informed them that the soul—or in modern occult language, "astral body"—is supposed to be an ethereal double or ghost, capable of projection to a distance. But the specific directions—finding these was unusual. Nor did they seem difficult to follow. Edmond has purposely been vague about these preparations, but one gathers that the two students visited several chemists before obtaining the ingredients needed. Where they secured the *cannabis indica* later discovered on the scene of the tragedy is a mystery, but not, of course, one impossible of solution.

On August 15th Ludwig, apparently without Edmond's knowledge, wrote to Scott by air-mail, describing the pamphlet and its contents, and asking for advice.

On the night of August 18th, approximately half an hour after Kenneth Scott received Ludwig's letter, the two young occultists undertook their disastrous experiment.

Later, Edmond blamed himself. In the diary he mentions Ludwig's uneasiness, as though the latter sensed some hidden danger. Ludwig suggested postponing the trial for a few days, but Edmond laughed at his fears. It ended with the two placing the required ingredients in a brazier and kindling the mixture.

There were other preparations, too, but Edmond is quite vague. He makes one or two furtive references to "the seven lamps" and "the infra color," but nothing can be made of these terms. The two had decided to attempt projection of their astral bodies across the continent; they would attempt communication with Kenneth Scott. One can detect a tinge of youthful vanity in this.

*Cannabis indica* formed one of the ingredients of the mixture in the brazier; that has been ascertained by analysis. It was the presence of this Indian drug which led so many to believe that the later entries in Edmond's diary were evolved from nothing more tangible than the fantasies of an opium or hashish dream, directed along the curious channels they took merely because of the students' preoccupation with those things at the time. Edmond dreamed he saw Scott's house in Baltimore. But it must be remembered that he had been staring at a photograph of that house which he had placed on the table before him; and he was consciously willing to go there. Nothing is more logical therefore, than that Edmond simply dreamed *what he wanted to dream*.

But Ludwig had the identical vision, or, at least, so he stated afterward—unless Edmond, in that entry, lied. It is the opinion of Professor Perry L. Lewis, a recognized expert on dream-phenomena, that Edmond, during his hashish vision, spoke of his illusions aloud, with no conscious intention of so doing, nor any later memory of it—and that Ludwig, as in a hypnotic trance, simply saw the phantasms Edmond's words conjured up in his mind.

Edmond states in his diary that after watching the burning contents of the brazier for some minutes, he fell into a state of somnolent trance, in which he saw his surroundings clearly, but with certain curious alterations which can only be attributed to the action of the drug. The marijuana smoker may see a tiny hall bedroom metamorphose itself into a huge vaulted chamber; similarly, Edmond stated that the room in which he sat seemed to enlarge. Oddly, however, the growth was of a strangely abnormal type; the geometry of the room gradually became *all wrong*. Edmond stresses this point without attempting to explain it. Just when the shifting became noticeable he does not mention, but presently he found himself in the midst of a chamber which, although recognizably his own, had changed *until it centered at a certain point*.

The notes are almost incoherent here. Edmond obviously found it difficult to describe what he saw in his vision. All the lines and curves of the room, he insists with odd emphasis, seemed to point at one specific spot, the brazier where the mixture of drugs and chemicals was smoldering.

Very faintly a persistent ringing came to his ears, but this dwindled and at last died away altogether. At the time Edmond thought the sound due to the effects of the drug. It was not until later that he learned of Scott's frantic efforts to reach him by means of long-distance telephone. The shrill ringing grew fainter and faded into silence.

Edmond was of an experimental turn of mind. He tried to shift his gaze to specific objects he remembered, a vase, a lamp, a table. But the room seemed to possess an indescribable viscid fluidity, so that he found his stare inevitably slipping along warped lines and curves until he was again watching the brazier. And it was then that he became conscious of something unusual taking place at that spot.

The mixture no longer smoldered. Instead, a strange crystal formation was building itself up within the brazier. This object Edmond found impossible to describe; he could only say that it seemed a continuation of the warped lines of the room, carrying them *beyond* the point where they centered. Apparently unconscious of the insanity of such a concept, he goes on to say that his eyes began to ache as he watched the crystalline object, but he could not turn away his gaze.

The crystal drew him. He felt an abrupt and agonizing suction; there was a high-pitched thrumming in the air, and suddenly he was drifting with increasing velocity toward the thing in the brazier. It sucked him in—such is Edmond's inexplicable phrase; he felt a moment of incredible cold, and then a new vision rose up before him.

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Gray fog, and instability. Edmond stressed this curious feeling of flux, which he declared existed *within himself*. He felt, he says oddly, like a cloud of smoke, wavering and drifting aimlessly. But when he glanced down he saw his own body, fully clothed and apparently quite substantial.

Now a dreadful feeling of uneasiness began to oppress his mind. The fog thickened and whirled; the nightmare, causeless fear familiar to the opium-taker clutched him in its grip. Something, he felt, was approaching, something utterly horrible and frightful in its potent menace. Then, quite suddenly, the fog was gone.

Far beneath him he saw what at first he took to be the sea. He was hanging unsupported in empty air, and a surging grayness shimmered and crawled from horizon to horizon. The fluctuating leaden surface was dotted and speckled with round dark blobs; these were innumerable. Without conscious volition he felt himself drawn down vertically, and as he approached the mysterious grayness he saw it more clearly.

He could not determine its nature. It seemed merely a sea of gray slime, protoplasmic and featureless. But the dark blobs became recognizable as heads.

Into Edmond's mind flashed the memory of a narrative he had once read, written in the Twelfth Century by the monk Alberico, and purporting to be the record of a descent into hell. Like Dante, Alberico had seen the torments of the damned; the blasphemers (he wrote in his stilted, pedantic Latin) had been immersed to their necks in a lake of molten metal. Edmond remembered Alberico's description now. Then he saw that the heads were not those of beings partly submerged in the gray slime; instead, they were homogenous with the grayness. They grew from it!

Edmond's fear had left him. With oddly detached curiosity he scanned the fantastic surface below. There were human heads bobbing and nodding from the gray sea, uncountable thousands of them, but by far the greater number of the heads were not human. Some of these latter bore traces of the anthropoid, but others were scarcely recognizable as living objects.

For the heads lived. Their eyes stared with awful agony; their lips writhed in soundless laments; tears coursed down the sunken cheeks of many. Even the horribly inhuman heads—bird-like, reptilian, monstrous things of living stone and metal and vegetable matter—showed

traces of the unceasing torment that gnawed at them. Down toward the ghastly horde Edmond was drawn.

Again blackness enveloped him. It was transitory, but as he emerged from momentary unconsciousness he felt (he says) curiously changed. Something had happened to him during that fateful period of darkness. There seemed to be a cloudy vagueness shadowing his mind, so that he viewed his surroundings darkly and through a kind of haze. In this new vision he seemed to be high in the air above a silent, moonlit city, and rapidly moving downward.

There was a full moon, and by its light he recognized the old brownstone house toward which he was descending. It was Kenneth Scott's home, made familiar to him by the photograph. A vague thrill of triumph warmed him; the experiment, then, had succeeded.

The house loomed up before him. He was hovering outside an open, unlighted window. Peering in, he recognized the slender form of Kenneth Scott seated at a desk. The occultist's lips were tightly compressed, and a worried scowl darkened his face. A great book with yellowed parchment pages was open before the man, who was studying it carefully. Occasionally his worried eyes would turn to the telephone on the desk beside him. Edmond made an attempt to call to Scott, and the latter looked up, staring through the window.

Instantly a shocking change transformed Scott's face. The man seemed to become quite insane with fear. He sprang up from the desk, overturning his chair, and simultaneously Edmond felt an impelling urge dragging him forward.

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What happened after that is confused and hazy. Edmond's notes are fragmentary at this point, and it is only possible to gather that Edmond was in the room and pursuing the frantic Scott in a fashion that was inexplicable and utterly abnormal. He was *flowing*—and Scott was caught and *engulfed*—and here Edmond's notes break off utterly, as though he had been overcome by remembrance of the episode.

Merciful blackness swallowed Edmond then, but there was one more flashing vision before the dream faded and was gone. Again he seemed to be outside Scott's window, swiftly retreating into the night, and through the open square of yellow radiance was visible part of Scott's desk and the crumpled body of the man himself lying on the carpet beyond it. At least Edmond assumed that it was Scott's body, for either the man was lying with his head doubled at an impossible angle out of sight beneath his torso, *or else he was headless*.

That ended the dream. Edmond awoke to find the room in darkness, and Ludwig stirring sleepily near by. Both students were distracted and overwrought. They argued excitedly for some time, with occasional semi-hysterical outbursts, and Ludwig revealed that his vision had been identical with Edmond's. It is a pity that neither of them took the trouble to analyze the situation and look for a logical explanation, but both, of course, were mystics, and thoroughly credulous.

The telephone rang. An impatient operator asked if Edmond would receive a call from Baltimore. She had, she said, been ringing the apartment for some time without getting a response. Edmond cut her off abruptly and requested that the connection be put through. But this could not be done. The operator at the Baltimore exchange reported that her party did not answer, and, after a futile exchange of questions, Edmond hung up. It was then Ludwig confessed to writing Scott, bemoaning the reticence that had made him refrain from telling the Baltimore occultist the purpose of the experiment—the destination to which the astrals were directed.

Nor were their fears calmed by the discovery of the object in the brazier. Apparently part of the vision at least had been founded on truth; the unknown chemicals had crystallized into a thing that appeared to be all planes and angles. It was formed of some brittle substance resembling frosted glass, was roughly pyramidal, and measured about six inches from apex to base. Ludwig wanted to smash it at once, but Edmond prevented him.

Their arguments were brought to an end by the arrival of a telegram from Scott. It read:

ATTEMPT NO EXPERIMENTS WITH PAMPHLET YOU MENTION STOP  
TREMENDOUSLY DANGEROUS AND MAY MEAN MY DEATH STOP AM  
WRITING YOU TODAY BY AIR MAIL FULL DETAILS STOP ADVISE YOU  
BURN PAMPHLET

KENNETH SCOTT

There were two more communications which resulted in Paul Edmond's temporary stay at a Hollywood hospital. The first was an item which appeared in time for the morning edition of the Los Angeles *Times* of August 20th. It stated briefly that Kenneth Scott, well-known author and occultist, residing in Baltimore, Maryland, had been mysteriously murdered. There were no clues to indicate the identity of the assailant, and the body had not been discovered until the afternoon of the 19th. The fact that the victim's head had been severed from his body and was inexplicably missing made identification at first doubtful, but Scott's physician confirmed the logical supposition. A quantity of grayish slime smeared on the carpet added another element of mystery to the case. Scott's head, the coroner declared, had been cleanly severed from his body by a sharp blade. Police stated that an arrest would be made shortly.

Needless to say, that arrest was never made. The tabloids seized the juicy morsel and made much of it, and an enterprising reporter unearthed the fact that Scott had sent an air-mail letter from the Baltimore Central post office shortly before the time at which his death had been fixed. It was this communication which was the direct cause of Edmond's nervous collapse and his retirement to a hospital.

The letter was found in Edmond's apartment, but it sheds little light on the case. Scott was a visionary, and his letter bears an almost suspicious resemblance to his fictional work.

"Both of you know" (ran part of the long letter) "how much truth there is often to be found behind old legends and folk-lore. The Cyclops is no longer a myth, as any doctor familiar with monstrous births can tell you. And you know how my theories regarding the Elixir Vitæ have been confirmed by the discovery of heavy water. Well, the myth of the Hydra is based on such a truth.

"There are innumerable tales of multi-headed monsters, all springing from the actual entity of whose real existence a very few have known through the ages. This creature did not originate on earth, but in the gulfs Outside. It was, after a fashion, a vampiric entity, living not on the blood of its victims but on their heads—their brains. This may sound strange to you, but you know by this time that there are beings Outside whose needs and flesh are not as ours. Through the eons this entity has ravaged in the abyss beyond our dimension, sending out its call to claim victims where it could. For this entity, by absorbing the heads and brains of intelligent creatures both of this world and of other planets, emerges with its powers and vitality greatly augmented.

"You both know that through the ages there have been certain people willing to worship the Great Ones—even the evil Aliens who have come down to us in folk-lore as demons. Every god and every entity has had its worshippers, from black Pharaoh to the least of the Aliens whose powers are more than human. And these cults intermingle in a very curious way, so that we find traces of a forgotten worship cropping up in far later times. When the Romans worshipped the Magna Mater in Italy's dark forests, for instance, why do you suppose they incorporated into their ritual the mystic adoration, 'Gorgo, Mormo, *thousand-faced moon*'? The implication is clear.

"I have gone into considerable detail, but it has been necessary to prepare you for my explanation of the origin of that pamphlet Robert found in San Pedro. I knew of this booklet, which was printed in Salem in 1783, but I had thought that there were no longer any copies in

existence. That pamphlet is a *trap*, and a most damnable one, created by the worshippers of the Hydra to lure victims into the maw of their god!

“It purports to be merely an innocent experiment with the astral self. However, the real purpose of the thing is to open a gateway and prepare a sacrifice for the Hydra. When the booklets were first distributed, through secret underground channels, there was an epidemic of deaths in New England. Dozens of men and women were found headless, with no trace of any human murderer. Yet the real killers were the ones who performed the experiment according to the directions given in the booklet, and unknowingly let the Hydra use their vital forces to materialize on this planet.

“Baldly speaking, what happens is this: the subject, following the instructions, inhales the fumes of the drug which tears apart the veil between our world and Outside. He concentrates upon the person whom he wishes his astral to visit, and that person is doomed. For the experimenter is drawn Outside, into another dimension of space, and through a certain psychic and chemical process is temporarily made one with the Hydra. What it amounts to is this: the Hydra, using the experimenter’s astral as a host, comes to earth and takes its prey—which is the person upon whom the subject has been concentrating. There is no real danger to the experimenter himself, save, perhaps, for a possible severe nervous shock. But the other—the victim—is taken by the Hydra for its own. He is doomed to eternal torment, except in certain unusual cases where he can maintain a psychic link with an earthly mind. But I need not speak of that.

“I am greatly worried. I have put through a long-distance call to Edmond’s apartment, and no doubt you will hear from me tonight long before this letter can arrive. If you are rash enough to undertake the experiment before I can communicate with you, I shall be in grave danger, for you may attempt projection of your astral to Baltimore, to me. After I have posted this letter, and while I am waiting for my telephone call to be put through, I shall do my utmost to find a protective formula, although I do not think one exists.

“KENNETH SCOTT.”

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It was this letter which sent Edmond to the hospital for a few days to recover from his nervous condition. Ludwig was apparently of stronger stuff; he stayed, at Edmond’s request, in the latter’s apartment, and indulged in some experimenting of his own.

Just what happened in Edmond’s apartment during the next few days will never be fully known. Ludwig visited his host daily at the hospital, and told him of his experiments, and Edmond noted what he could remember on slips of paper which he subsequently inserted between pages of his diary. One is inclined to believe that the anomalous mixture of drugs in the brazier continued to exert its influence on the minds of the two students, for certainly Ludwig’s experiences, as recorded by Edmond, seem like a continuation of the original hashish dream.

Ludwig had burned the pamphlet, as might be expected. And then, on the night following Edmond’s removal to the hospital, the other youth maintained, he had heard Scott speaking to him.

Edmond did not scoff, for he was vastly credulous. He listened intently while Ludwig declared that the occultist was still alive, although existing in another dimension of space. The Hydra had captured Scott, but the occultist had the power to communicate with Ludwig. It is necessary to keep constantly in mind the fact that neither of these two youths was quite normal after the mental agitation he had undergone.

So Ludwig added more and more every day to his tale, and Edmond listened. They spoke furtively, in whispers, and Edmond kept careful watch over his notes so that they would not fall into skeptical hands. The whole crux of the matter, Ludwig said, was the strange crystalline object which had formed in the brazier. It was this which kept open the path to Outside. One could pass through it if one wished, despite the fact that it was not as large as a man's head, because the crystal created a "warp in space"—a term Edmond mentions several times, but entirely neglects to explain. The Hydra, however, could not return to earth unless the original conditions were duplicated.

Ludwig said he had heard Scott's voice whispering thinly from the crystalline thing of insane planes and angles, and the occultist was in horrible agony and insistent that Ludwig rescue him. It would not be difficult, provided the student followed instructions implicitly. There were dangers, but he must have courage, obey, and strive to undo the harm he had done. Only thus could Scott be freed from endless agony and return to earth.

So, Ludwig told Edmond, he went through the crystal—again this vague and extraordinary phrase!—taking those things Scott had said he would need. Chief among these was a razor-keen, bone-handled carving knife. There were other objects, some of them difficult to obtain, which Ludwig did not specify, or which if he did, Edmond did not mention in his notes.

According to Ludwig's narrative, he went through the crystal, and he found Scott. But not at first. There were nights of fumbling progress through fantastic and terrible visions of nightmare, guided always by the insistent whisper of Scott's voice. There were gates to be passed, and strange dimensions to traverse. And so Ludwig moved through awful abysses of pulsing, fearful darkness; he went through a place of curious violet light that sent tinkling, evil trills of goblin laughter after him; he went through a Cyclopean deserted city of ebon stone which he shudderingly recognized as fabled Dis. In the end he found Scott.

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He did what was necessary. When he came to the hospital the next day Edmond was shocked by the bloodless pallor of his friend, and the little crawling lights of madness that shone in his eyes. The pupils were unnaturally dilated, and Ludwig spoke that day in disjointed whispers which Edmond found hard to follow. The notes suffered. It is only clear that Ludwig declared he had freed Scott from the grip of the Hydra, and that over and over again the youth kept muttering something about the terrible gray slime that had smeared the blade of his carving-knife. He said his task was not yet ended.

Undoubtedly it was the drug-poisoned mind of Robert Ludwig speaking when he told how he had left Scott, or at least the living part of him, in a plane of space which was not inimical to human life, and which was not subject to entirely natural laws and processes. Scott wanted to return to earth. He could return now, Ludwig told Edmond, but the strange vitality that maintained life in what was left of Scott would dissipate immediately on earth. Only in certain planes and dimensions was it possible for Scott to exist at all, and the alien force that kept him alive was gradually departing now that he was no longer drawing sustenance from the Hydra. Ludwig said that quick action was necessary.

There was a certain spot Outside where Scott could achieve his desire. In that place thought was obscurely linked to energy and matter, because of an insane shrill piping (Ludwig said) that eternally filtered from beyond a veil of flickering colors. It was very near the Center, the Center of Chaos, where dwells Azathoth, the Lord of All Things. All that exists was created by the thoughts of Azathoth, and only in the Center of Ultimate Chaos could Scott

find means to live again on earth in human form. There is an erasure in Edmond's notes at this point, and it is only possible to make out the fragment: “. . . *of thought made real.*”

White-faced, hollow-cheeked, Ludwig said that he must complete his task. He must take Scott to the Center, although he confessed to a horrible fear that made him hesitate. There were dangers in the way, and pitfalls where one might easily be trapped. Worst of all, the veil shielding Azathoth was thin, and even the slightest glimpse of the Lord of All Things would mean utter and complete destruction to the beholder. Scott had spoken of that, Ludwig said, and had also mentioned the dreadful lure that would drag the young student's eyes to the fatal spot unless he fought strongly against it.

Biting his lips nervously, Robert Ludwig left the hospital, and we assume met with foul play on his way to Edmond's apartment. For Edmond never saw his friend again on earth.

The police were still searching for the missing head of Kenneth Scott. Edmond gathered that from the newspapers. He waited impatiently the next day for Ludwig to appear, and after several hours had passed without result, he telephoned his apartment and got no response. Eventually, worried and almost sick with anxiety, he spent a turbulent ten minutes with his doctor and another with the superintendent. Finally he achieved his purpose and went by taxi to his apartment, having overruled the objection of hospital officials.

Ludwig was gone. He had vanished without a trace. Edmond considered summoning the police, but speedily dismissed the thought. He paced about the apartment nervously, seldom turning his gaze from the crystalline object that still rested in the brazier.

His diary gives little clue to what happened that night. One can conjecture that he prepared another dose of the narcotic drug, or that the toxic effects of the fumes Edmond inhaled several days before had finally worked such disintegration within his brain that he could no longer distinguish between the false and the real. An entry in the diary dated the following morning begins abruptly, "I've heard him. Just as Bob said, he spoke through the crystal thing. He's desperate, and tells me that Bob failed. He didn't get Scott to the Center, or S. could have materialized again on earth and rescued Bob. Something—I'm not sure what—caught Bob, God help him. May God help all of us. . . . Scott says I must begin where Bob left off and finish the job."

There is a soul laid bare on the last pages of that record, and it is not a pleasant sight. Somehow the most frightful of the unearthly horrors the diary describes seem not quite as dreadful as the last conflict that took place in that apartment above Hollywood, when a man wrestled with his fear and realized his weakness. It is probably just as well that the pamphlet was destroyed, for such a brain-wrecking drug as was described in it must surely have originated in some hell as terrible as any which Edmond portrays. The last pages of the diary show a mind crumbling into ruin.

"I went through. Bob has made it easier; I can begin where he left off, as Scott says. And I went up through the Cold Flame and the Whirling Vortices until I reached the place where Scott is. Where he *was*, rather, for I picked him up and carried him through several planes before I had to return. Bob didn't mention the suction one has to keep fighting against. But it doesn't get very strong until I've got quite a distance in."

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The next entry is dated a day later. It is scarcely legible.

"Couldn't stand it. Had to get out. Walked around Griffith Park for hours. Then I came back to the apartment and almost immediately Scott spoke to me. I'm afraid. I think he senses that, and is frightened too, and angry.

"He says we can't waste any more time. His vitality is almost gone, and he's got to reach the Center quick and get back to earth. I saw Bob. Just a glimpse, and I wouldn't have known it was he if Scott hadn't told me. He was all-awry, and horrible somehow. Scott said the atoms of his body had adapted themselves to another dimension when he let himself get caught. I've got to be careful. We're nearly at the Center."

The last entry.

“Once more will do it. God, I’m afraid, horribly afraid. *I heard the piping*. It turned my brain into ice. Scott was shouting at me, urging me on, and I think trying to drown that—other sound, but of course he couldn’t do it. There was a very faint violet glow in the distance, and a flickering of colored lights. Beyond, Scott told me, was Azathoth.

*“I can’t do it.* I don’t dare—not with that piping, and those Shapes I saw moving far down. If I look in that direction when I’m at the Veil it will mean—but Scott is insanely angry with me. He says I was the cause of it all. I had an almost uncontrollable impulse to let the suction draw me back, and then to smash the Gateway—the crystal thing. Maybe if I find myself unable to keep looking away from the Veil when next I go through I’ll do just that. I told Scott if he let me come back to earth for one more breathing-space I’d finish the job this next time. He agreed, but said to hurry. His vitality is going fast. He said if I didn’t come through the Gateway in ten minutes he’d come after me. He won’t, though. The life that keeps him going Outside wouldn’t be any use on earth, except for a second or two.

“My ten minutes is up. Scott is calling from the Gateway. *I’m not going!* I can’t face it—not the last horror Outside, with those things moving behind the Veil and that awful piping screaming out——

“I won’t go, I tell you! No, Scott—I can’t face it! You can’t come out—*like that*. You’d die—I tell you I won’t go! You can’t force me—I’ll smash the Gateway first! . . . what? No! No, you can’t . . . you can’t do it! . . . Scott! Don’t, *don’t* . . . *God—he’s coming out——*”

That was the last entry in the diary, which police found open on Edmond’s desk. A hideous screaming and subsequently a stream of red liquid seeping out sluggishly from beneath the door of Edmond’s apartment had resulted in the arrival of two radio patrol officers.

The body of Paul Edmond was found near the door, the head and shoulders lying in a widening crimson pool.

Near by was an overturned brass brazier, and a flaky white substance, granular in nature, was scattered over the carpet. Edmond’s stiff fingers still tightly gripped the object which has since been the cause of so much discussion.

This object was in an incredible state of preservation, in view of its nature. Part of it was coated with a peculiar grayish slime, and its jaws were clamped tightly, the teeth having horribly mangled Edmond’s throat and severed the carotid artery.

There was no need to search further for the missing head of Kenneth Scott.

[The end of *Hydra* by Henry Kuttner]