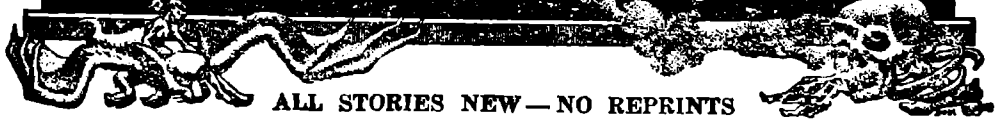


Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

July, 1945

Cover by Lee Brown Coye

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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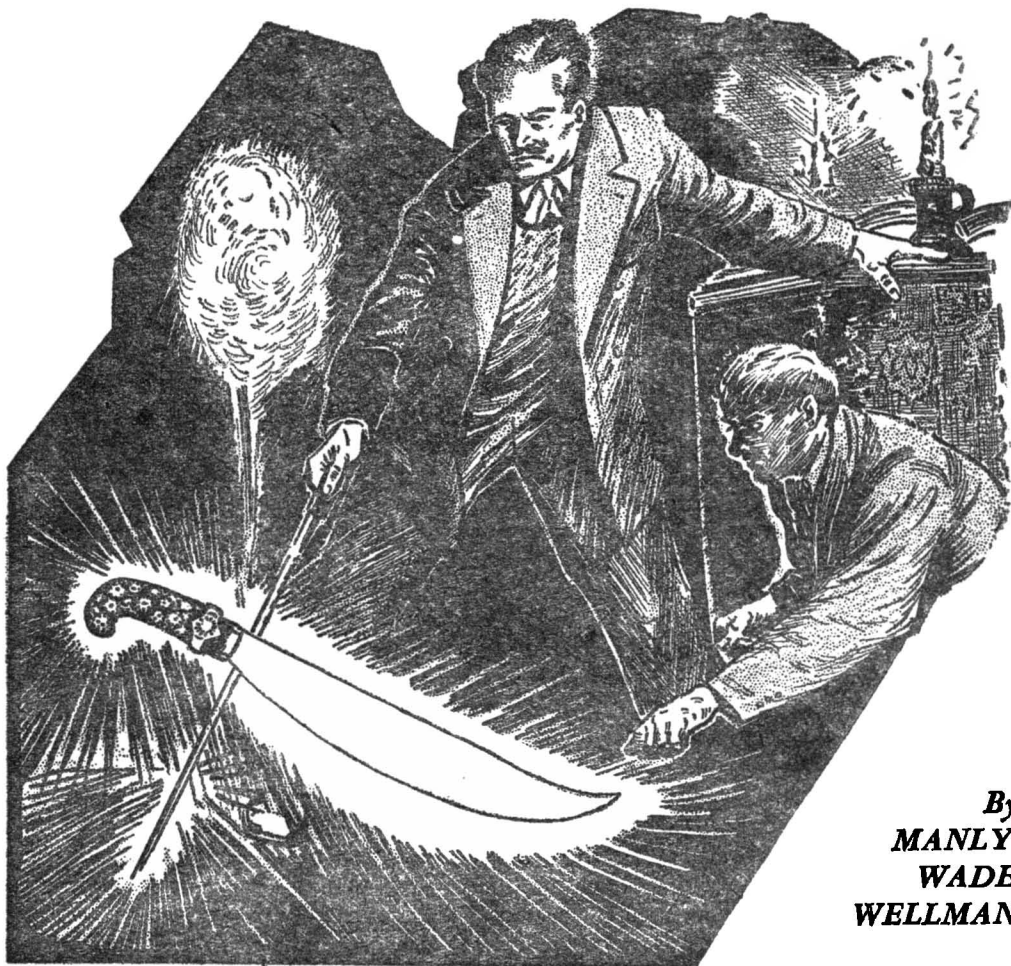
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D. McILWRAITH, Editor.

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The Dai Sword



By
**MANLY
WADE
WELLMAN**

“LOTS of shops, lots of private collectors would like to bid on it,” the little straw-tinted man assured Thunstone, “but I felt that you—the sort of man you are, with occult knowledge and interests—ought to have first refusal.”

In his comfortable chair by the club window, Thunstone was almost as tall sitting down as was the straw-tinted man standing

up. Thunstone’s long broad hand took the pipe from under his clipped dark mustache, Thunstone’s wide gloomy eyes studied the curved sword that had been laid on the magazine stand. From the chair opposite, young Everitt was leaning forward to look, too.

“Arabian sword?” asked young Everitt. He liked to slide himself into private discussions. His father had been a director

... and a Dai blade must never be drawn except for the shedding of blood

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

of this club, and an acquaintance of Thunstone. Young Everitt wanted to be a personal friend, or anyway said so. Thunstone was slow about admitting men and women to his personal friendship. He hated to be prejudiced about things like eyes being too close together, but he was. And young Everitt's bright, small eyes were very close together indeed.

"It is a sword from Nepal," the straw-tinted man was informing Everitt. "A sword of the warrior class, peculiar to the Dais. They are an offshoot, a schism one might say, of the Gurkhas."

"I thought Gurkhas were those little pickle things," smirked Everitt at Thunstone, who smiled back but not very broadly. "Why is this sword worth so much?"

"Because it is a thing of ritual," replied the straw-tinted man. "Because there are so few such swords ever offered for sale. Because," and his pale little forefinger tapped the wire-bound hilt, "it is set with precious jewels."

At the word "jewels," young Everitt bounded eagerly out of his chair and bent to look more closely.

"Jewels, all right," he agreed, as if he had been requested to pass judgment. "Not awfully good ones, though. There's a flaw in the ruby. And those emeralds, I'm not very wrought up about them." He scowled, and his close-set eyes seemed to crowd each other even more. "The one on the pomel, the dull one set in silver—what is it?"

"A Dai stone," said the straw-tinted man. His eyes, which were also straw-tinted, turned to seek Thunstone's. He did not seem to like Everitt.

"Dai—dye?" echoed Everitt. "You ought to dye it, some brighter color." Again he chuckled over his own pun. "Never heard of one."

"From the name of that stone the Dais take the name of their sect. . . . I wouldn't draw the sword, not now."

But Everitt had already cleared the blade from its scabbard of brass-studded leather. The steel shone as with frantic scrubbing and polishing. Thunstone, returning his pipe to his mouth, fancied that he could mirror his own square face in that brightness. The curve of the blade was double-

edged, not only on the outer arc but the inner curve, which was almost as abrupt as that of a fish hook. And the point itself looked deadly sharp, like the sting of a wasp.

"I am afraid," said Thunstone gently, "that I'm not a good prospect for the sale. May I ask where you got such a specimen?"

The straw-colored man shook his head. He might have been deploring Thunstone's refusal, or declining to tell the history of his acquisition. "I had hoped," he said after a moment, "that you would be interested in the history of the Dais."

"I know a little about the Dais," Thunstone replied, still gently. "Not much, but a little. I am not of their faith, and I have no use for so peculiar a part of it as a Dai sword."

EVERITT suddenly squealed out an oath, not proper language in that quiet and conservative club room. Still holding the drawn sword in one hand, he furiously wrung the fingers of the other.

"I was just going to put it back in the sheath," he told them, "and—but you can see for yourself!"

Had he been years younger, you would have said that Everitt pouted. He thrust his hand under Thunstone's nose. The quivering thumb had been punctured at the center of the ball, and blood trickled in a shiny thread. Thunstone meditated that no artificial scarlet can come near the brightness of fresh blood. Drawing his hand back, Everitt sucked the thumb scowlingly, like a bad-tempered baby.

"Of course," said the straw-tinted man, taking the sword and sheathing it without mishap, "the Dais would find that accident a fortunate one for you."

"Fortunate?" repeated Everitt thickly, past the thumb in his mouth.

It was Thunstone who said: "As I understand it, a Dai blade must never be drawn except for the shedding of blood. The sect insists that bloodless drawing is the worst of ill luck."

"And, should they draw for polishing or sharpening only, or for exhibition only," amplified the straw-tinted man, "they will prick themselves deliberately, just as you did just now inadvertently, to avert the ill

luck." He weighed the sheathed weapon in his hand. "I'm sorry, Mr. Thunstone, that you are not interested. As I suggested before, perhaps I should show it to a collector or—"

"Wait," said Everitt.

He had taken his thumb out of his mouth. His narrow-set eyes watched a new bead of blood as it slowly formed on the wet skin. When he spoke again, he sounded ill-humored. "If Thunstone doesn't want the thing, maybe I do. How much for it, Mister?"

Thunstone, refilling his pipe, watched. The straw-tinted man remained silent for a moment. Finally he named a sum, and he sounded as though he were trying to ask too much. Everitt snorted.

"That's pretty steep," he said. "What about—"

"I cannot bargain."

"Then I'll take it." With his unwounded hand, Everitt produced a wallet of dark brown leather, and opened it. "Prefer cash, do you." He flipped out some bills. "Keep the odd six dollars for your trouble in coming up here."

"I never accept tips," the straw-tinted man said tonelessly. From his own wallet, a foreign-looking fold made to accommodate notes of another size and shape than American money, he counted out a five and a one. He gazed for a moment at the sword, at Thunstone, and at Everitt. He bowed, or rather nodded, like a toy with a moveable head.

"May I wish you good luck with this purchase," he said, and passed the sword to Everitt. "It is very rare and curious in this part of the world. Thank you."

When he had departed, Everitt looked sharply at Thunstone.

"I suppose," he said, "you want to know why I bought this little gimmick."

"I don't believe in requiring explanations from people," replied Thunstone.

"Well, I'm a rationalist and an empiricist," announced Everitt, who was neither. "I'll show you, and show everybody, that this isn't any magic tool—it's just so much metal and bad jewelry, put together in a funny shape." He studied his thumb again. "The bleeding's already stopped. This time I won't be so clumsy."

Picking up the sword, he drew it with a rather stagey flourish. Even in Everitt's fist, unschooled to swords, it balanced perfectly. Its blade again caught silvery lights. Thunstone speculated as to what alloy had gone to its smelting and forging. Everitt smiled rather loftily, and dipped the curved point back into the sheath, smacking the blade smartly home. An instant later he had dropped the sword, swearing more loudly than before.

"I've cut myself again!" he cried sulkily.

MR. MAHINGUPTA, when visited that evening by John Thunstone, made him welcome in his study as he would have welcomed less than ten other Occidentals. Mr. Mahingupta was smaller even than the straw-tinted man, with a youthful slimness and spryness utterly deceptive; for he was old and wise, nobody this side of the seas knew quite how old and how wise. His brilliant eyes slanted a bit in the finest of brown faces, and his clothes were exquisitely tailored without extremity of cut. He offered cigarettes and a little silver cup of brandy that must have been quite as old as he himself.

"To call the Daís an offshoot of the Gurkha cult is pure ignorance," he answered Thunstone's query, in accents more Oxonian than Herbert Marshall's. "We Gurkhas aren't a cult at all, sir. In faith we are Hindu, and in blood mixed Aryan and Mongol. As Rajputs—men of the warrior caste—we maintain a certain individuality, of course. You know that Gurkha record in many wars." Mr. Mahingupta sighed, perhaps remembering campaigns and stricken fields of his distant youth. "Far too many people misunderstand the East and, misunderstanding, loudly persuade others to misunderstand also."

"Then there is no different quality to the way the Gurkha worship?" prompted Thunstone. "Different, that is, from orthodox Hinduism?"

"The difference is in descent and training only," Mr. Mahingupta assured him. "In the remote beginning, great Brahma fathered the various castes. From his mouth issues the first of the priests, hence their wisdom. From his right arm was born Shaktia, first of my warrior forbears, hence our

strength. Merchants sprang from his thighs, laborers and mechanics from his feet."

Thunstone had heard all that years before. "The Dais," he pursued. "Are they also of warrior caste?"

Mr. Mahingupta's mouth- corners turned up briefly and thinly. "Who can say whence they came? In Nepal exist many of them, in towns close to the Himalayas. For all I know, or anyone knows, they may descend from the abominable ice-devils. As to their claims of power I may not judge. I do not like them, and neither would you, I hope."

"I told you of the Dai jewel in the hilt of the sword. What is it?"

"Jewels," said Mr. Mahingupta, "should be cleanly dug up from under ground, not evoked by magical formula. I do not have patience with such strange chemistry or alchemy or whatever. From what I hear, every Dai stone is of artificial origin, or anyway of preternatural origin. I saw but one in my life." The lips pursed, still harshly. "It served as the single eye of an excessively unpleasant little statue. I dug it out as a gesture of defiance toward those who worshipped the thing. This happened more than your lifetime ago, but see."

He extended a slender, delicate hand. The brown forefinger was crooked as from a bad fracture, and seamiy scarred as from deep burns. That was all Mr. Mahingupta said about the adventure, and probably not even Everitt would have urged him to say more. Mr. Mahingupta lifted his brandy cup.

"Though I despise and denounce the Dai worship and all its claims," he went on, "yet I am afraid that the unhappy young man you mention is as good as dead now, for his idiocies. Be comforted that civilization will advance unhampered by such a clumsy fool and boor. I regret, my dear friend, that I can help you no further."

"You mean that you can't," asked Thunstone, "or that you won't?"

"Both," said Mr. Mahingupta.

THE night was not too far spent when Thunstone left Mr. Mahingupta, and he called on young Everitt.

Everitt's quarters were what might stand

for the popular idea of a bachelor apartment. It was a place in the eighties, with a large living room, two bedrooms to one side, and a kitchen with a long-idle range, an electric refrigerator, and rows and rows of liquor bottles. On the walls of the living room hung various consciously male paraphernalia—crossed foils, boxing gloves, hockey sticks, none of which Everitt knew how to use. Higher up were fastened the stuffed heads of animals Everitt had not himself killed. Everitt wore a wine-dark robe with a luxuriantly folded white scarf, and greeted Thunstone with a cordiality over-warmed by drink.

"So you found the way up here at last," he said. "What'll you have? Cocktail? Swizzle? Name it and I'll fix it."

"Nothing, thanks," demurred Thunstone, who would rather savor in retrospect the brandy Mr. Mahingupta had given him. "I was in the neighborhood, and I thought I'd see how your hand was doing. That second cut was pretty bad."

Everitt drew from the pocket of his robe the hand in question. It was taped over the ball of the thumb, and most of the palm was swaddled in criss-crossed gauze.

"The doctor asked me if I'd been bitten," he said. "It got kind of inflamed or infected—Lord! How he hurt me with that germicide stuff!" Everitt bit his lip at the memory.

Thunstone looked closely at the hand. The fingers were flushed and a bit swollen, but he could not judge if they were dangerously sore. Everitt slid the hand back into his pocket, and nodded at the wall.

"Anyway, there it hangs. How does it look?"

He had tacked up a square of figured Indian cloth, and on this was displayed the Dai sword, drawn and slanted across its own sheath. Again Thunstone remarked the silvery glow of the metal, almost like the glow of great heat. Thumb tacks held blade and sheath in place, and one of these at the pommel was red. No, that was the stone that had seemed so dull in the club. It gave off a color-tint both flushed and gloomy like—well, like a drop of blood gone a little stale.

"That jewel on the hilt does catch the light funny, doesn't it?" said Everitt,

watching Thunstone. "And I thought it was dull."

Thunstone took a step nearer the wall. "You drew it again, I see. Maybe you're wise not to return it to the sheath."

"I think it looks better displayed like that," explained Everitt, lighting a cigarette. "I'll sheathe it again, though, any time I feel like it. Right now, if you like, just to show you I'm not afraid."

"I wish," said Thunstone, "that a man I know were here to look at the thing. His name's E. Hoffmann Price."

"The writer?" Everitt's scorn for all who wrote was manifest.

"He's more than that," replied Thunstone. "For one thing, he's an accomplished fencer and understands swords thoroughly. He's likewise a recognized student of the Orient, and as for occult matters, he's an expert."

"Bring him around some time if you like," granted Everitt, "but don't let him think he could buy the thing back from me. At first I felt I was overpaying; but didn't somebody or other say that it isn't what you pay for anything that sets its value—it's whether you still want it after you've bought it—"

"Apparently you still want it, then," suggested Thunstone.

"Wouldn't be without it," Everitt assured him airily. "And, just to show that I'm perfectly ready to sheathe it at any time—"

He extended a hand toward the hilt with the flushed jewel. At that instant the doorbell rang.

Everitt went to open the door. There stood the straw-tinted man.

"I am sorry to call so late," he greeted them, "but I wish to rectify a mistake. It seems," and he gulped, "that I had no right to sell that Dai sword."

HIS straw tint was paler than it had been, as though straw had been coated with frost. His eyes caught the sheen of the weapon on the wall. "There it is," he said eagerly. "May I return the money and have it back?"

"You may not," Everitt told him.

"I say that I should not have sold it."

"You've found that out a trifle late," Everitt reminded, mixing himself a new

drink. "Anyway, the sale's completed. Thunstone here was a witness to the transaction. I paid you money, which you put in your pocket, and that was that."

"I'll pay you a difference of—"

"No," said Everitt.

"I'll double the sum—"

"If it's worth that much for you to buy back, it's worth that much for me to hang onto." Everitt grinned and squinted. "I don't need money, Mister, but I've a liking for the sword."

The straw-tinted man lifted his shoulders wearily. Very narrow, thin shoulders they seemed just then. He faced Thunstone appealingly. "Persuade your friend," he begged.

"Thunstone knows that I won't change my mind," said Everitt. "Some people call me stubborn, some that I'm just determined. "Take your choice, but I won't sell you your sword again. If you stole it, or otherwise acted illegally, that's your funeral, not mine. Now, how about a drink? Drinking's a good way to end any argument."

The straw-tinted man shook his head and turned back to the door.

"Wait," Thunstone called to him. "I'm coming with you." To Everitt he said, "promise me that you'll leave that Dai sword alone until I see you again."

"I'll make no such idiotic promise," snickered Everitt. His manner was the sort that Thunstone was apt to resent, even violently. But the big man said no more, not even a farewell. He followed the straw-tinted stranger out and down to the street. It was a fine night, without a moon.

"I suggest that you tell me enough to help me save Everitt," ventured Thunstone after a little silence. But the straw-tinted man shook his head slowly.

"I dare not," he almost moaned. "I'm in a sad enough situation as it is."

"Have the Dais been after you?"

"I know of no Dais in this hemisphere."

"That doesn't answer my question," insisted Thunstone. "Have they been after you? . . . You don't answer, which means that they have."

"I do not deny it," said the straw-tinted man. "Once among the Dais, you are forever touched with something of their influence, even from a great distance. You,

sir, have been considerate of me, and I would rather not afflict you with—with what afflicts me."

"You are not a Dai?" Thunstone prompted.

"Once I might have become one. I sought out their scholars and teachers, went a little way into their lore. Why not? An American has become a lama in Tibet, which is harder by far to do. Anyway, I progressed far enough to have the sword. I had won the right to possess it, but not the right to relinquish it. That truth I realized tonight—the thought came into my heart, it was put there from somewhere far off. Now I feel doom growing near and dense around me."

He shuddered, and Thunstone steadied him with a massive hand on his shoulder.

"Come home with me," bade Thunstone.

AT THUNSTONE'S hotel, there were books to study, as usual. One was a translation by Gaster of that manuscript *Sword of Moses* which is believed by many to date from earlier than the fourth century and which has been called by Oxford scholars a connecting link between old Grecian mysteries and the magical works of the Middle Ages.

"Know that the man who wishes to use the sword must free himself for three days from accidental pollution," read Thunstone, "and from every unclean thing . . ."

Like the ceremony of knighthood, he mused as he read, wherein the aspiring youth must fast, bathe, pray and keep vigil before being vouchsafed the weapon which would be his badge of gentility and prowess. Were not the swords of heroes rated in the old stories as having special power and personality, even bearing names like living beings—Gram, Durandal, Excalibur? Thunstone gazed at his silent guest, wondering what sort of initiation he had undergone. Undoubtedly none that Everitt would endure.

Thunstone took a second volume, the *Key of Solomon*, as translated by "H. G. on April 8, 1572." It was a sizeable work divided into ten parts, and plainly had been well thumbed before Thunstone had gained possession of it. Especially worn were the pages of the last section, entitled "*Of ex-*

periments extraordinary that be forbidden of good men."

Thunstone found references to swords from almost the first pages, and there was a sub-section of *swords and knives*.

It is necessary in operation of artes to have swords and knives and other instruments of which circles may be made and other necessary operations. . . . If swords be necessary, let them be scoured and clean from the first hour. . . .

There followed diagrams to show the "form and fashion" of such instruments. Two of the many outlines, entitled *cuttellus niger* and *cuttellus albus*, were reminiscent of the curved, double-edged Dai blade. There was mention also of other magical weapons, including lance, scimitar, sickle, dagger, poignard, and a knife called Andamco. Thunstone reached for a third book.

This, a massy tome bound in red cloth, was a beautifully printed English work, by a man whom Thunstone had often opposed and once or twice damaged. Here and there little gatherings and cults use it as a veritable bible, taking to heart its startling teachings and going through the forms of its rather pompous rituals. It is a slipshod work, containing some passages of startling beauty as well as masses of carelessly written and wordy nonsense. On the next to the last page Thunstone found what he was looking for:

. . . Let the scholar take steel, smelted according to the previous formula, and by his understanding skill beat, grind and sharpen it into a sword. Let it be engraved with the words and symbols ordained, and employed in the performance of mysteries. Let none touch, save those deserving . . .

Thunstone slammed shut the book and put it away.

"So," he said aloud, "you made the weapon yourself?"

"I did," replied the straw-tinted man, with an air of tragic resignation.

"Each Dai makes his own? Even to the Dai jewel on the pommel?"

"That is given us." The desperate eyes of strange color sought Thunstone. "Do you think I sold because I needed money? No—only to rid myself of the sword and all memory of the Dais. But they know,

far off in their own country, and send me their thoughts." The eyes closed. "I hear them now. They say to return to Everitt and demand the sword—tomorrow."

"Then we did wrong to leave him to-night," said Thunstone at once, and got quickly to his feet. "Go back to him now—wait, we both go back."

He put on his hat, and from a corner took a rather heavy walking stick of Malacca, with a silver band around its balance. "This was a gift from an old friend of mine, a Judge Pursuivant," he explained. "I'm ready to go if you are."

THIS time there was no response to their ringing at Everitt's door. Thunstone pushed at the panel with the ferrule of his stick, and it creaked inward on its hinges. They walked in.

The lights were on, and showed them Everitt, lying in his crumpled robe against the wall beneath the square of cloth on which the Dai sword had hung. Quickly Thunstone strode to his side and knelt. Everitt did not move when Thunstone touched him. He was dead, with his throat slit neatly as if by a razor-sharp edge.

Clutched in Everitt's unbandaged hand was the sword, snugly set in its sheath. The stone at the pommel gleamed red and baleful as fire in mist.

"A third time he tried to sheathe it un-blooded," the straw-tinted man was babbling. "The third time, as in so many cases, was the finality-time. It turned in his hand and killed him."

Thunstone put a hand toward the weapon, but the straw-tinted man was before him, snatching at the hilt. Everitt's dead hand remained closed on the sheath, and the sword came clear as the straw-tinted man pulled at it. Its blade gleamed silver-white and spotless.

"No blood on it," said Thunstone.

"Because it drinks the blood in, as sand drinks water. Only the stone shows what has happened," and a pale-tan finger tapped the pommel. "Now, how to sheathe it once more?"

The strangely colored eyes gazed calculatingly at Thunstone, who straightened his bulk and, standing erect, gazed back.

"I can explain to the police," he said.

"At least, there are certain high officials of the police who are ready to accept any explanation I care to make about anything. But that thing you hold must be disposed of quickly. I suggest that we drive into the country and bury it deeply in some field or woods." Stooping, he pulled the sheath from Everitt's inert fingers. "How shall we put it back into this?"

"It will not go in without bloodshed," the straw-tinted man said, weighing the curved sword with practised grip. "The thing has a spirit of its own. It is like the *Yan*—the devil—they say lives in that sword owned by the Fire-King. Probably you never heard of it."

"I've heard," Thunstone assured him. He held his stick horizontally across his body, right hand at the knob, left hand lightly holding it near the ferrule. "Frazer refers to it in *The Golden Bough*. Isn't that the sword owned by a ruler in the Cambodian jungle, of which it is claimed that if it is drawn the world will come to an end?"

"It may not be so powerful, but it has power, from the blood it has drunk," said the straw-tinted man. "This, too, must drink blood. Mr. Thunstone, I regret what I must do. Perhaps I need only make a slight wound, if you do not resist."

Thunstone cleared his throat harshly. "I give no blood to that thing. It has had victory enough, over you and over poor Everitt."

"You are unarmed, you cannot refuse." By a slight alteration of the position of his wrist, the straw-tinted man brought the point into line with Thunstone's broad chest. He sidled gingerly in.

Thunstone twisted the stick in his hands. The lower part seemed to slip away, baring a slim straight blade, bright as the Dai sword. He dropped both the hollow loose part and the sheath he had taken from Everitt.

"I expected something like that," smiled the straw-tinted man. "Of course, neither of us are being personal about this. Your sword cane cannot help you. This is a sword of power. It must be wetted with blood."

"Come on," invited Thunstone, his great body easily assuming the attitude of a fencer.

The curved blade swept fiercely at him,

clanged against his own interposed strip of metal, and bounded back like a ball from a shutter. The straw-tinted man exclaimed, as though an electric shock had run up his arm. He fell back, reassumed position and lunged again, this time with the point.

A single movement of Thunstone's lighter blade engaged and deflected the attack.

"I too have a sword of power," he said. "I had not time to warn you, but watch."

He feinted, coaxed his opponent into trying another slash. This he parried and, before the straw-tinted man could recover, darted in his own point. It struck solidly at the pommel of the Dai sword, projecting beyond the fist that held it. There was a sharp *ping*, and the red-flushed jewel bounced away across the floor like a thrown marble. Next instant Thunstone had dipped his blade under, engaged again, and with a quick press and slap had beaten the heavier weapon from the straw-tinted man's grasp.

A warning jab with the point made his disarmed opponent drop back. Then, "Watch," said Thunstone again, and pointed his own blade at the fallen Dai sword.

There was responsive movement in the thing, like the furtive retreating rustle of a frightened snake. As his point approached it, it shifted on the floor, moving on the planks with a little grating tinkle. For a moment it seemed to set its point hungrily toward the straw-tinted man, but Thunstone's weapon struck it smartly, and it faced away. Like a bit of conjuror's apparatus dragged by an invisible thread on the stage it moved, at first slowly and jerkily, then with more speed and smoothness. He

herded it painstakingly toward the fallen leather sheath.

"How—how—" the straw-tinted man was stammering in absolute incomprehension.

Urged inexorably by a last touch of Thunstone's blade, the sword seemed fairly to scurry the last distance. It slid into the sheath with an abrupt *chock*, and lay quivering.

Thunstone picked it up and laid it carefully on a table.

"My blade is silver, a great specific against black magic," he now had time to say. "Look at the inscription. It's old, a little worn, but perhaps you can make out the Latin."

The pale straw-tinted face bent to read. "*Sic pereant omnes inimici tui,*" he repeated slowly. "My Latin is not as good as it might be."

"So perish all thine enemies," translated Thunstone. "From the Song of Deborah, in the book of Judges. Pursuivant said that this silver sword was forged by St. Dunstan himself, and he was able to conquer no less an enemy than Satan. Pick up the Dai stone in your handkerchief. We can bury it along with the sword."

The straw-tinted man knelt to retrieve the jewel.

"It is dull again, as though all the blood had run out of it," he said, and rose, facing Thunstone hopefully. "And I have no sense of any more thought-commands from far away. Am I free? Why do you interest yourself in matters like these?"

"I sometimes wonder," replied John Thunstone, fitting his sword cane back together.

