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If you travelled into the future a million years, you would expect to find the world vastly changed. Suppose you found it much as it is today? That's what happened to one man who went forward to "The Millionth Year" and the mystery he solved makes enthralling reading. Arthur Cooke tells the yarn in the next issue.

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THE GOBLINS WILL GET YOU

by Hugh Raymond

When playing poker with goblins, be careful what you bid. Particularly if the goblins have ulterior purposes.

Illustration by Bok

IT SHOULDN'T have happened to a dog.

I woke up one night and saw them grinning over the counterpane at me like a row of painted heads off a Coney Island three-sheet. The time was three o'clock as I could easily see by the luminous hands of my alarm clock. Oddly enough I remained unshocked.

They explained later that a sort of preparatory hyponosis had been worked — involving a lot of ground-up vegetable greens I found under my bed every night for a week before and couldn't up to then account for.

I lay quietly and simply stared and they stared back. I was a bit upset, of course, but none of your "crawling feeling down the spine" stuff. The faces were inhuman, distorted, elongated, squashed, some nauseating, others merely enough to make one squeamish. And the glow which backgrounded the whole scene took away a lot of the mystery. They had hands and feet—plainly seen — and they didn't float.

Finally I opened diplomatic negotiations.

I said, "Hello."

The faces yawned a trifle, grew misty and jagged, then resumed a solid appearance. This I found was due to the impact of physical noises on their nervous systems. Being creatures of an order necessarily "other dimensional," they found it a trifle difficult maintaining what to them was a decent state of appearance.

As soon as the shaking and quaking had stopped and the gargoylish eyes had been popped back into many sockets, a large-headed one goggled fiercely in what was probably intended to be a reassuring smile and said, "Teach us to speak English."

This was the first indication of the peculiar irrelevancy which governed their reactions. Later on it was enough to drive anyone crazy. As a matter of fact it did.

But you *are* speaking English," I remarked, collecting my thoughts as rapidly as possible and pulling my pajamas away from my legs to which they were glued with cold perspiration.

"That's what you think," three cavernous mouths intoned solemnly in unison and three enormous heads bent toward me. "We want to know the rules."

"You mean the ropes," I answered.

"We mean the rules," snapped the first big head.

"That's what *I* mean." I said and picked up a flashlight. The beam didn't affect them at all. But the case flew back suddenly and crashed through the back of the bed.

"Don't get tough!" warned all the heads wiggling and wagging.

I nursed a wrenched wrist and stuck my tongue out at them.

"So help me Joe, I only wanted to see you better. Though why, I don't know. By the standards

of this world you make a hippopotamus look like a raging beauty."

They subsided grumbling. The flashlight was returned, badly dented.

WELL, the first few nights were the hardest. I managed to get them past the silly impression that they didn't speak English at the end of the second. By the fourth night I was missing the lost sleep. But I got no reprieve.

They were queer creatures by any standards. At first they were reticent in talking about themselves. What was wanted chiefly was knowledge about other people. From hints they let drop I concluded, finally, that they were certainly not of the tribe of Adam or any branch thereof or doing business at the same stand.

After awhile I stopped feeling sleepy. This was due mainly to the fact that while they read the books they had me bring around from the local libraries, I snatched a couple of thousand winks, interrupted at choice intervals by a twinge as they awakened me by the crude, though simple process of banging the book on my forehead.

What a sight in the odd glow which emanated from all around them! Like a scene out of some Oz book. A row of heads gathered in a semi-circle, beyond the light, pitch blackness and me in bed. Great eyes popping and staring.

Occasionally one or another would laugh and the whole bunch would go reeling off into instability for a few seconds and then come to a standstill like water in a quiet pool.

I stood all this for two weeks. When I ran out of money paying for lending library rentals, they materialized some and gave it to me.

Holy mother! Twenty thousand smackers in good old one dollar bills! And brand new! Laying quietly a few feet beneath their faces I became suddenly suspicious.

"Is it queer?" I asked and crinkled one of the notes between my fingers.

The one with the biggest head looked up from the copy of "Gone With the Wind."

"It shouldn't be," he said nonchalantly. "We got them out of the U.S. Treasury vaults in—what did you call it?—oh, Washington."

I went through the floor.

Piles of books accumulated. Luckily I had my own apartment, so nosy chambermaids never interfered. The only thing that got interfered with was my private life. They monopolized my time, got me to quit my job and alienated my girl. It was awful. When I came home one night with the ring she threw in my face, I looked the mob squarely in their excuses for faces. They were a bit ashamed.

"But why?" I cried, burying my head in my arms.

They gazed at me stonily then.

"It was necessary. It is all in the rules."

I looked up angrily.

"What rules?"

"*The underlying rules.*"

The heads swayed smugly. I picked up a book and threw it at them. It went past the row harmlessly.

"Underlying *what*?" I asked, dropping helplessly back to the bed.

One of them started to talk in Russian. He was quickly slapped down. The biggest of the heads cocked one of its eyes at

me.

"Everything," he said. "*Everything.*"

From the moment they began giving me money I never wanted for comfort. I even moved out of the apartment to a swankier place uptown. The goblins failed to appear for several days after this and I began to feel that the visitation was over. When I woke suddenly the fourth night, I realized immediately that what I had done was O.K. by them. They proved it by coming back. They looked carelessly at the bookcases.

"You have bought us no new books," said one, wagging a finger at me.

I lit a cigarette and put one arm under my neck.

"I have been moving. I apologize. What do you want?"

"Books." A dozen mouths formed the word.

I became irritated.

"I am grateful for everything you have done," I stated, "Yes, even the bad things, like taking my girl away and making a damn slave out of me. I have always wanted comfort and now I've got it. But couldn't you get your books at the public libraries? They have three and a half million at the 42nd St. branch. Think of it! Books on *every* subject, books covering all the phases of earth life. *Those*," I pointed disdainfully with my cigarette at the stocks of books in their cases along the walls, "are a drop in a vast bucket."

They looked down at me disapprovingly.

"No," they said. "It is not in the rules."

I WAS happy until they told me why they were going to all the trouble of acquainting themselves with the psychology of earth-men. I blew-up.

"You fools!" I cried, screaming with laughter. "What could you do with the planet? Enslave it? The rich have done that already. Dissect a billion bodies? Go to our hospitals. They do it

every day. Dig for diamonds? Shall I make you some?" I roared on: "Perhaps you are hungry for green cheese. Go to the moon. I guarantee it to be fresh and untouched by the hand of man."

A dozen heedless fingers turned over page 242 of Oswald Spengler's "Decline of the West" and twenty-four eyes began reading the top of page 243.

"Come with me," I urged, still rocking with mirth. "Let me take you into the homes of the people of the earth and show you life as they live it. You shall hear the screaming of women in labor, the ticking of the feet of roaches on the bare plaster of walls, the scrape of worn-out shoes on patched carpet, a thin gasp in darkness as love is fulfilled and the crest of the wave breaks on the rocks of poverty. Hover with me over the squares of this teeming metropolis and observe the scurrying lines emerging from nowhere and vanishing in obscurity. Feel with me the texture of the skins of a hundred thousand women of the night, listen for the breath in their whispered words which should be happiness but in reality is sandpaper on scalded tongues. My friends, listen. It is madness to want us, insanity to imagine that you harbor the notion. Preserve your reason. Go home. Go home. Surely the earth is but a footstool to heaven, a mere step on your ladder of success. My friends. . . ."

Calmly the busy fingers turned page 263. They were fast readers.

I shrugged my shoulders, winced at a sudden pain in the small of my back and put out the cigarette by crushing it against the bed spring cross-bar.

I went to sleep.

There was only one direction in which to move — forward. And up I went. First the swankier apartment, then still another and still another. Finally I bought a large residence on Riverside Drive and made it my castle. *Theirs*, too. The stacks of



books grew to overwhelming proportions. They flowed out of the cases onto the floors everywhere. The basement was crammed, the attic door was locked. To have unlocked it would have started an avalanche. The only room in the house relatively free was the bathroom.

I advanced socially, culturally, politically. The goblins were vaguely pleased at my rise in the world. Somewhat amusedly they watched my slow advance from businessman to alderman to

mayor to state senator. Their mouths took on crinkles when I related my speeches and told of my great successes in beating down the opposition. The night I was elected to Congress I gave a little party.

They were honest and sentimental. Somehow they understood the reason for the celebration and what lay behind the reason and, in a sense, participated. They engaged in the little fest by keeping decently quiet when I wanted to talk and ans-

wering when requested.

IN THE HUGE living room of my house, attired in a rich lounging robe, smoking my pipe which I held in one hand and drinking a Tom Collins which I held with the other, I sat in a deep, comfortable armchair and surveyed the scene. The familiar one. A dozen heads, the apex of a dozen spindly bodies, feet resting lightly on the floor, arms akimbo in most cases, folded in others.

I raised my glass.

"To me," I shouted, "and why not?"

"Why not?" remarked the biggest-headed one tonelessly. "It is all in the rules."

I ignored his redundancy.

"Yes, to me, to me because of my success and to you, my dear ones because you made it possible." I drank deeply and set the glass down. I looked up. A grave smile was upon their countenances.

"Ummmmmmmm," I noised. "What's up?"

The group grew mournful. Their glow increased and cast dancing shadows about the room. They elongated and became taller. I felt suddenly a chill blowing through the room.

The tiniest headed one moved forward and stopped a foot away from my outstretched feet.

"We shall do it soon," he said, working his thin jaws up and down almost comically.

"It?"

"The conquest. We shall take you. All of you."

"Oh." My heart sank. "Is there nothing that can be done about it?"

"Nothing *you* could do about it."

I smoked my pipe silently for awhile.

"I want you to know that I have enjoyed my association with you," I said, looking up and gazing at them sadly.

They all crowded closer.

"So have we," they said mournfully and backed away again.

"And there is nothing that can be done about it?" I asked needlessly. I was aware of their power.

The heads swung back and forth ponderously in the negative.

"When do you plan to begin? How will you do it?"

"Within a week," said the biggest-headed one, "and it will not be pleasant."

"It will be painful?"

"It will be painful, but it will be in the rules."

I left them for a while, went upstairs and fingered my gun. Presently I put it away and shook my head. Then I returned and continued the odd merry-making and finally went to bed and dreamed peacefully.

I had six days to work in, and in three I considered almost a thousand separate plans for circumventing theirs. All were fantastic and impossible. I was clinging to the final silly notion I conjured up, when all of a sudden a practical idea hit me and knocked me utterly sane. Of course!

I got them interested in poker. They were a funny lot as you may have guessed and, suspecting nothing, enjoyed the game. We used real money as stakes, which was somewhat silly because as soon as one of them was cleaned out (which was almost always due to my own cleverness) he would merely materialize a newly printed, freshly wrapped stack of bills and continue playing.

Simultaneously I fed them on Arthurian legend and tales of chivalry until suggestion had strengthened their already strong sense of honor.

The fifth night I began the fatal game.

The game started out very early in the evening and I lost heavily according to plan. The progress of the game left me poorer and poorer. I watched their faces carefully as it went on. Slowly they were becoming enthusiastic, acquiring the instinct of the true poker player which is to continue through dawn and beyond. Their faces became radiant, eagerly each one waited for the next hand to begin. I played them carefully, noting the rise of excitement. When I judged them ready, I reached for the cards.

The fourth goblin to my left opened. He tossed a thousand dollars into the pot. Everyone followed suit except the biggest-headed one and the smallest headed one who were playing

together and dropped.

When they finished drawing I gave myself the other two kings I had carefully placed in position in the deck and settled back in my chair. The opener carefully considered his hand and bet. The other joined and I tossed the required money to the center of the table. Presently everyone dropped out of the game except the opener and myself. He bet a sum equivalent to what I had left. I let this pass and then suddenly raised.

"The earth and its people," I said.

"What's that?" They all looked at me with startled glances, noses wagging.

"I said I raise you the earth and its people. I can do this. I think you will find it in the rules."

The goblins consulted together while I kept my hand carefully.

Finally they turned to me as one.

"We have decided that you are right. It is in the rules," said the tiniest headed one and I heaved a concealed sigh of relief because I was almost dead sure it wasn't.

"But how shall we cover this raise?" continued the other and nodded to the opener.

I raised my eye capily.

"Twenty billions in gold will do it," I stated flatly and held on to my seat as the cellar rocked under the sudden impact of the arrival of twenty billion dollars' worth of pure gold right out of several national mints and treasuries. I pictured the mess of books lying at the bottom of the terrific weight.

"Ummmmmm," I ummmmed, considering my cards. "Will you see me?"

"I will see you," replied the opener and I laid down my cards.

"Four kings," I said grandly. The world looked good.

"I have four aces," remarked the other nonchalantly and laid his own hand down.

You know what that means.