

# FANTASTIC UNIVERSE.

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|--|---------------|
| Murderer's Chain .....                     | 10            |
| <i>by Wenzell Brown</i>                    |               |
| Bruggil's Bride .....                      | 18            |
| <i>by Robert F. Young</i>                  |               |
| The Rejected Sorcerer .....                | 29            |
| <i>by Jorge Luis Borges</i>                |               |
| Skies of Infamy .....                      | 31            |
| <i>An Article by Lester del Rey</i>        |               |
| Israel's Lunar Probe .....                 | 40            |
| <i>by Shalom Cohen</i>                     |               |
| The Perverse Erse .....                    | 41            |
| <i>by Adrien Coblenz</i>                   |               |
| Time For Survival .....                    | 44            |
| <i>by George O. Smith</i>                  |               |
| The Mind Thing .....                       | 48            |
| <i>by Fredric Brown</i>                    |               |
| The Abominable Coalman .....               | 78            |
| <i>A Special Feature</i>                   |               |
| <i>by Ivan T. Sanderson</i>                |               |
| Fannnotations .....                        | 80            |
| <i>A Monthly Feature by Belle C. Dietz</i> |               |
| The Marrying Monster .....                 | 82            |
| <i>by Claus Stamm</i>                      |               |
| Two-Man Space Cabin .....                  | 87            |
| <i>A Special Feature</i>                   |               |
| Beep No More, My Lady .....                | 92            |
| <i>by Robert Bloch</i>                     |               |

# REJECTED SORCERER

by JORGE LUIS BORGES

IN SANTIAGO there once was a dean who had a consuming desire to learn the art of magic. He heard that Don Illan of Toledo was more versed in it than anyone else, so he set out for Toledo to find him.

The day that he arrived he went directly to Don Illan's house and found him reading a book in a room set apart from his home. The latter received him with good will and bade him put aside the motive of his visit until after eating. He showed him to pleasant quarters and told him that he was very pleased by his arrival. After the meal, the dean disclosed to him the reason for his visit and requested that he instruct him in the science of magic. Don Illan told him he had divined that he was a dean, a man of good position and good fortune, but that he feared that afterward he would be forgotten by him. The dean gave his promise and his assurance that he would never forget the favor, and that he would be always at his service. With the matter now arranged, Don Illan explained that the

magic arts could be learned only in a remote place, and, taking him by the hand, led him to an adjoining room on the floor of which there was a large iron ring. He then told the servant girl to prepare partridges for supper, but not to put them on to roast until he so requested. Between them the two men pulled up on the iron ring and descended so far along a carved stone stairway that it seemed to the dean that the very river bed of the River Tajo must be over their heads. At the foot of the stairway there was a cell and then a library and then a sort of study containing instruments of magic. They began to go through the books, and were engaged in this, when two men entered with a letter for the dean, written by his uncle the bishop, who made it known to him that he was very sick and that he should not delay in coming if he wished to find him alive.

This news greatly annoyed the dean, on the one hand because of the suffering of his uncle, and on the other because it meant interrupting his

studies. He chose to write his apologies which he sent to the bishop. Three days later some men in mourning arrived, carrying other letters for the dean in which it was learned that the bishop had died, that a successor was being elected, and that it was hoped through the grace of God that the dean himself would be elected. They said also that he should not trouble himself to come, since it seemed preferable that he be elected *in absentia*.

Ten days later there arrived two pages in rich dress who threw themselves at his feet and kissed his hand, and greeted him as bishop. When Don Illan saw these things, he approached the new prelate with great joy and told him that he praised God that such good news should have come to his house. Then he requested the vacant deanship for one of his sons. The bishop made it known to him that he had reserved the deanship for his own brother, but that he had decided still to treat him favorably, and that they should depart together for Santiago.

The three went to Santiago, where they were received with honors. Six months later the bishop received messengers from the Pope who was offering him the archbishopric of Tolosa, leaving in his hands the naming of his successor. When Don Illan heard of this, he reminded him of the former promise and requested the title for his son. The archbishop made it known to him that he had reserved the bishopric for his own uncle, his father's brother, but that he had decided still to treat him favorably and that they should depart together for Tolosa. Don Illan had no choice but to accept.

The three went to Tolosa where they were received with honors and masses. Two years later, the arch-

bishop received messengers from the Pope who was offering him the office of cardinal, leaving in his hands the naming of his successor. When Don Illan heard of this, he reminded him of the former promise and requested the title for his son. The Cardinal made it known to him that he had reserved the archbishopric for his own uncle, his mother's brother, but that he had decided still to treat him favorably and that they should depart together for Rome. The three went to Rome where they were received with honors, masses, and processions. Four years later the Pope died and our cardinal was elected to the papacy by the others. When Don Illan heard of this he kissed the feet of His Holiness, reminded him of the former promise and requested the cardinalship for his son. The Pope threatened him with imprisonment, saying to him that he knew quite well that he was nothing more than a sorcerer and that in Toledo he had been a professor of magic arts. The unhappy Don Illan said that he was going to return to Spain, and he asked him for something to eat along the road. The Pope refused the request. Then Don Illan (whose face strangely had become younger) said in a firm voice:

"Well, then, I'll have to eat the partridges I ordered for tonight."

The servant girl appeared and Don Illan told her to put them on to roast. With these words, the Pope found himself in the subterranean cell in Toledo, nothing more than dean of Santiago, and so ashamed of his ingratitude that he tried not even to apologize. Don Illan said that this trial was sufficient, denied him his share in the partridges and accompanied him to the street where he wished him a pleasant trip and dismissed him with great courtesy.