

The Shadow out of Space

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I

The most merciful thing in the world... is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on an island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far...

If it is true that man lives forever on the edge of an abyss, then certainly most men must experience moments of awareness — of a kind of precognition, as it were — when the vast, unplumbed depths which exist forever on the rim of man's little world become for one cataclysmic moment tangible, when the terrible, boundless well of knowledge of which even the most brilliant man has only tasted, assumes a shadowy being capable of striking the most primal terror into even the stoutest heart. Does any living man know the true beginnings of mankind? Or man's place in the cosmos? Or whether man is doomed to the worm's ignominious end?

There are terrors that walk the corridors of sleep each night, that haunt the world of dream, terrors which may indeed be tenuously bound to the more mundane aspects of daily life. Increasingly, I have known such an awareness of a world outside this world — coterminous, perhaps, yet not impossibly completely hallucinatory. Yet it was not always so. It was not so until I met Amos Piper.

My name is Nathaniel Corey. I have been in the practice of psychoanalysis for more than fifty years. I am the author of one textbook and uncounted monographs published in the journals devoted to such learned papers. I practiced for many years in Boston, after studying in Vienna, and only within the last decade, in semi-retirement, removed to the university town of Arkham, in the same state. I have a hard-earned reputation for integrity, which I fear this paper may seem to challenge. I pray that it may do more than that.

It is a steadily disturbing sense of premonition that drives me at last to setting down some record of what is perhaps the most interesting and provocative problem I have faced in all my years of practice. I am not in the habit of making public statements regarding my patients, but I am forced by the peculiar circumstances attending the case of Amos Piper to set forth certain facts, which, in the light of other, seemingly unrelated data, may quite possibly assume a greater importance than they appeared to have when first I made their acquaintance. There are powers of the mind which are shrouded in darkness, and perhaps also there are powers in darkness beyond the mind — not witches and warlocks, not ghosts and goblins, or any such desiderata of primitive civilizations, but powers infinitely more vast and terrible, beyond the concept of most men.

The name of Amos Piper will not be unfamiliar to many people, particularly to those who recall the publication of anthropological papers bearing his byline a decade or more ago. I met him for the first time when his sister, Abigail, brought him to my office one day in 1933. He was a tall man who had the look of once having been fleshy, but upon whose large-boned frame the clothes now hung as if he had lost much weight in a comparatively short time. Indeed, this proved to be the case, for, while Piper seemed to need medical attention far more than the services of a psychoanalyst, his sister explained that he had sought out the best medical care, and one and all the doctors he had seen had concluded that his trouble was primarily mental and beyond their curative powers. Several of my colleagues had recommended me to Miss Piper, and at the same time some of Piper's fellow savants on the faculty of Miskatonic University had added their commendations to those of the medical counsel Piper had sought out, hence the coming of the Pipers to fulfill an appointment.

Miss Piper prepared me a little with her statement of her brother's problem, while he was composing himself in my consultation room. She set forth with admirable succinctness. Piper appeared to be the victim of certain terrifying hallucinations, which took the shape of visions whenever he closed his eyes or lowered his eyelids while in a waking state, and of dreams when he slept. He had not slept, however, for three weeks, during which time he had lost so much weight that both of them had become profoundly alarmed at his condition. As prelude, Miss Piper recalled to my

mind that her brother had suffered a nervous collapse while at the theatre three years before; this collapse had been of such duration that it was actually only for the past month that Piper had seemed once more to have become his normal self. His new obsession — if such it was — had begun scarcely a week after his return to normal; it seemed to Miss Piper that there might be some logical connection between his former state and this occurrence following a brief normalcy. Drugs had proved successful in inducing sleep, but even they had not eliminated the dreams, which seemed to Dr. Piper to be of a peculiarly horrible nature, so much so that he hesitated to speak of them.

Miss Piper answered frankly such questions as I asked her, but betrayed the lack of any real knowledge of her brother's condition. She assured me that he had never been violent at any time, but he was frequently distraught and apparently separated from the world in which he lived, with a manifest line of demarcation, as if he existed in a shell enclosing him from the world.

After Miss Piper took her leave, I looked in on my patient. I found him sitting wide-eyed beside my desk. His eyes had an hypnotic quality, and appeared to be held open by force of will, for the eyeballs were extremely bloodshot, and the irises seemed to be clouded. He was in an agitated condition, and began at once to apologize for being there, explaining that his sister's determined insistence had left him no recourse but to yield to her. He was all the more unwilling to heed her demands because he knew that nothing could be done for him.

I told him that Miss Abigail had briefly outlined his trouble, and sought to calm his fears. I spoke soothingly in generalized terms. Piper listened with patient respect, apparently yielding to the casual yet reassuring manner with which I have always sought to inspire confidence, and when at last I asked why he could not close his eyes, he answered without hesitation, and quite simply, that he was afraid to do so.

“Why?” I wanted to know. “Can you say — if you will?”

I remember his reply. “The moment I close my eyes, there appear on the retina strange geometrical figures and designs, together with vague lights and even more sinister shapes beyond, as of great creatures past the

conception of mankind — and the most frightening thing about them is that they are creatures of intelligence — immeasurably alien.”

I urged him then to make an attempt to describe these beings. He found it difficult to do so. His descriptions were vague, but startling in what they suggested. None of his beings seemed clearly formed, except for certain rugose cones which might as readily have been vegetable in origin as animal. Yet he spoke with such conviction, striving to limn for me the astonishing creatures of which he dreamed so insistently, that I was struck by the vividness of Piper’s imagination. Perhaps there was a connection between these visions and the long illness which had beset him? Of this he was reluctant to speak, but after a while he began to go back to it, somewhat uncertainly, speaking of it disconnectedly, so that it was left for me to piece together the sequence of events.

His story began properly in his forty-ninth year. This was when his illness came upon him. He had been attending a performance of Maugham’s *The Letter* when, in the middle of the second act, he had fainted. He had been carried to the manager’s office, and efforts were there made to revive him. These were futile, and finally he was removed to his home by police ambulance; there medical men spent some further hours in an attempt to bring him to. As a result of their failure, Piper was hospitalized. He lay in a comatose state for three days, at the end of which he returned to consciousness.

It was immediately observed, however, that he was “not himself.” His personality seemed to have suffered a profound disorientation. It was at first believed by his medical attendants that he had been the victim of a stroke of some kind, but this theory was reluctantly abandoned for lack of corroborative symptoms. So profound was his ailment that some of the most ordinary acts of man were performed by him with the utmost difficulty. For instance, it was noticed at once that he seemed to have difficulty grasping objects; yet nothing seemed wrong with his physical structure and his articulation appeared to be normal. His approach in grasping things was not that of a creature with fingers, but a motion of opening fingers and thumb as if to pick up and handle objects without finger mobility, in a motion that was claw-like rather than manual. Nor was

this the only aspect of his disturbing “recovery.” He had to learn to walk all over again, for he seemed to attempt to inch along as if he had no locomotive power. He had, too, a most extraordinary difficulty in learning to speak; his first attempts to do so were made with his hands, in the same claw-like motion with which he sought to grasp objects; at the same time, he made curious whistling sounds, the meaninglessness of which visibly troubled him. Yet it was perceived that his intelligence did not appear to have suffered any impairment, for he learned rapidly, and in a week’s time he had mastered all those prosaic acts which are part of any man’s daily life.

But, if his intelligence had not been impaired, his memory for the events of his life had been all but wiped out. He had not recognized his sister, nor had he known any of his fellow faculty members on the staff at Miskatonic University. He professed to know nothing of Arkham, of Massachusetts, and but little of the United States. It was necessary to make all this knowledge available to him anew, though it was only a short time — less than a month — before he had assimilated all that had been put before him, rediscovering human knowledge in an amazingly brief time, and manifesting a phenomenally accurate memory of everything he had been told and had read. Indeed, if anything, his memory during his illness — once indoctrination had been completed — was infinitely superior to the functioning of that part of his mind before.

It was only after Piper had made these necessary adjustments to his situation that he began to follow what he himself described as “an inexplicable” course of action. He was on indefinite leave from Miskatonic University, and he began to travel extensively. Yet he had no direct and personal knowledge of these travels at the time of his visit to my office, or at any time since his “recovery” from the illness which had afflicted him for three years. There was nothing remotely resembling memory in his account of these travels, and what he did on these journeys he did not know; this was extraordinary, in view of the astounding memory he had displayed during that illness. He had been told since his “recovery” that he had gone to strange, out-of-the-way places on the globe — the Arabian desert, the vastnesses of Inner Mongolia, the Arctic Circle, the Polynesian Islands, the Marquesas, the ancient Inca country of Peru, and the like. Of what he did there he had no recollection whatever, nor was there anything in his luggage

to show, save for one or two curious scraps of what might have been antique hieroglyphic writings, most of them on stone, such as any tourist might be interested in adding to a small collection.

When not engaged on these mysterious journeys, he had spent his time reading very widely, and with almost inconceivable rapidity at the great libraries of the world. Beginning with that of Miskatonic University in Arkham — one well known for certain forbidden manuscripts and books gradually accumulated over a period of centuries begun in colonial times — he had ranged as far as Cairo, Egypt, in such studies, though he had spent most of his time at the British Museum in London and the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris. He had consulted innumerable private libraries, wherever he could gain admittance.

In every case, the records which he had subsequently troubled to check in that single brief week of his “normalcy” — using every available means: cablegram, wireless, radio, in the sense of urgency which, he said, impelled him — showed that he had read avidly of certain very old books, of but a few of which he had had only the remotest knowledge prior to the onset of his illness. They were such books related to ancient lore as the Pnakotic Manuscripts, the Necronomicon of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred, the Unaussprechlichen Kulten of Von Junzt, the Comte d’Erlette’s Cultes des Goules, Ludvig Prinn’s De Vermis Mysteriis, the R’lyeh Text, the Seven Cryptical Books of Hsan, the Dhol Chants, the Liber Ivoris, the Celaeno Fragments, and many other, similar texts, some of which existed only in fragmentary form, all of which were scattered over the globe. Of course, there was also a leavening of history, but it was to be noted, according to the records of withdrawals in such libraries as Piper had been able to check, that reading in any given library had always begun with books that accounted legendry and supernatural lore, and from them progressed into studies of history and anthropology, in a direct progression, as if Piper assumed that the history of mankind began not with ancient times but with the incredibly old world which existed before man’s measured time as known to historians, and which was written about in certain dreaded and terrible lore to be found only in eldritch books held of an occult nature.

He was also known to have made contacts with other persons with whom he had had no prior acquaintance, but whom he now met as by prearrangement at various places, persons of similar pursuits, also engaged in somewhat macabre research, or affiliated with the faculty of some college or university. Yet there had been always one affinity among them, as Piper had learned by dint of telephoning across oceans and continents to people whose communications he found among his papers when he had returned to “normalcy” — each of them had suffered a seizure either identical with or very similar in nature to that which had come upon Piper at the theatre.

Though this course of action was not related to Piper’s way of life before the illness came upon him, it remained fairly consistent for the duration of that illness, once it had been set. The strange and unaccountable trips he had undertaken soon after he had once again accustomed himself to living among his fellowmen after his initial “recovery” had continued throughout the three years he had been “not himself.” Two months at Ponape, a month at Angkor-Vat, three months in Antarctica, a conference with a fellow-savant in Paris, and only brief periods in Arkham between journeys; such was the pattern of his life, this was the way in which he had spent the three years prior to full and complete recovery, which in turn had been followed by another period of profound displacement, which permitted Amos Piper no memory of what he had done during those three years, and subjected him to a dread of closing his eyes lest he see that which suggested to his subconscious mind something awe-inspiring and terrible, coupled with his dreams.

II

It was only after three visits that I managed to persuade Amos Piper to set down for me a sequence of his strangely vivid dreams, those nocturnal adventures of his subconscious mind which troubled him and disturbed him so deeply. They were very similar to one another in nature, and each of them was unconnected and fragmentary, since none had any transitional phase from waking to dream. Yet, in the light of Piper's illness, they were challengingly significant. The most common of them was a repetitive dream of place; this, in one variation or another, occurred repeatedly in the sequence which Piper set down. I reproduce here his own account of the repetitive dream.

"I was a scholar at work in a library in a colossal building. The room in which I sat transcribing something in a book in a language which was not English was so large that the tables in it were as high as an ordinary room. The walls were not of wood, but of basalt, though the shelves which lined the walls were of a kind of dark wood I did not know. The books were not printed, but entirely in holograph, many of them written in the same strange language which I wrote. But there were some which were in recognizable languages — this recognition, however, seemed to spring from an ancestral memory — in Sanscrit, Greek, Latin, French — even English, but English of much variation, from the time of Piers Plowman to our own time. The tables were lit with large globes of luminous crystal together with strange machines made of vitreous tubes and metal rods, without connecting wires of any kind.

"Apart from the books on the shelves, there was an austere barrenness about the place. The exposed stonework showed some odd carvings, invariably in curvilinear mathematical designs, together with inscriptions in the same hieroglyphs which were written in the books. The masonry was megalithic; convex-topped blocks fitted the concave-bottomed courses which rested upon them; and all rose from a floor composed of great octagonal flagstones of a similar basalt. Nothing was hung upon the walls, and nothing decorated the floors. The shelves rose from floor to ceiling, and

between the walls were only the tables at which we worked at a standing position, since nothing resembling chairs was in evidence, nor was the inclination to sit down felt.

“By day I could see outside a vast forest of fernlike trees. By night I could look upon the stars, but none was recognizable; no single constellation of those skies even remotely resembled the familiar stars which were the nocturnal companions of Earth. This filled me with terror, for I knew that I was in an utterly alien place, far removed from the terrestrial surroundings I had once known, and which now seemed a memory of an incredibly far existence. Yet I knew that I was an integral part of all this, and at one and the same time wholly distinct from it; or, as if part of me belonged to this milieu, and part did not. I was very much confused, and all the more so to recognize that the material I was writing was nothing more or less than a history of Earth of a time I believed was one I had lived — that is, the twentieth century; I was setting this down in the minutest detail, as if for study, but I knew not for what purpose, save to add to the tremendous accumulation of knowledge already in those countless books in the room in which I sat as well as in adjoining rooms, for the entire building of which this room was but one was a vast storehouse of knowledge. Nor was it the only one, for I knew from such conversation as went on around me that there were others far removed, and that in them all there were other writers such as us, similarly engaged, and that the work we were doing was vital to the return of the Great Race — which was the race to which we belonged — to the places in the universes which had once, aeons gone by, served us as home until the war with the Ancient Ones had forced us into flight.

“I worked always under great fear and an inspired terror. I was afraid to look at myself. There was omnipresent a lurking fear that some hideous discovery was implicit in even the most fleeting glance at my body, which sprang from the conviction that I had stolen such a glance at some past time and had been profoundly frightened at sight of myself. Perhaps I feared that I was like the others, for my fellow-workers were all around me, and all were alike. They were great rugose cones, resembling a vegetable in structure, more than ten feet in height, with heads and claw-like hands attached to thick limbs which were ringed around the apex of their bodies. They walked by expanding and contracting the viscous layer attached to

their bases, and, though they did not speak a language I recognized, yet I was able to understand the sounds they made because, as I knew in my dream, I had been instructed in that language from the moment of my arrival at that place. They did not speak with anything that resembled a human voice at all, nor did I, rather by a combination of strange whistlings and the clicking or scraping of huge claws attached to the end of two of their four limbs, which radiated from what supposedly would have been their necks, save that no such part of their bodies was visible.

“Part of my fear arose from the dim understanding that I was a prisoner within a prisoner, that even as I was imprisoned within a body similar to those around me, so this body was imprisoned within the great library. I sought in vain for any familiar thing. Nothing was there to suggest the Earth I had known since childhood, and everything hinted at a point far out in space as that which we now occupied. I understood that all my fellow-workers were captives of some kind, too, though there were occasional appearances by warders who, though they were similar in form to the others, nevertheless, wore an air of authority, and came walking among us, often to assist us. These warders were not menacing, but courteous, if firm.

“Though our warders were not supposed to engage us in conversation, there was one among them who was under no restrictions. He was evidently an instructor, and moved among us with more importance than the others, and I noticed that even the other warders deferred to him. This was not alone because he was an instructor, but also because he was held to be doomed, for the Great Race was not yet ready to move, and the body he inhabited was destined to die before the migration would take place. He had known other men, and he was in the habit of stopping at my table — at first with only a few words of encouragement, but finally to talk for longer periods of time.

“From him I learned that the Great Race had existed on Earth and on other planets of our own universe as well as those of others, billions of years before recorded history. The rugose cones which made their present form had been occupied for only a few centuries, and were far from their true form, which was more kin to a shaft of light, for they were a race of free minds, capable of invading any body and displacing the mind which

inhabited it. They had occupied Earth until they had become involved in the titanic struggle between the Elder Gods and the Ancient Ones for the domination of the cosmos, a struggle which, he told me, accounted for the Christian Mythos among mankind, for the simple minds of early men had conceived of their ancestral memories of this struggle as one between elemental Good and elemental Evil. From Earth, the Great Race had fled outward into space, at first to the planet Jupiter, and then farther, to that star on which they now were, a dark star in Taurus, where they remained ever watchful for invasion from the region of the Lake of Hali, which was the place of banishment for Hastur of the Ancient Ones, after the defeat of the Ancient Ones by the Elder Gods. But now their star was dying, and they were preparing for a mass migration to another star, either backward or forward in time, and for the occupation of the bodies of creatures more long-lived than the rugose cones which now afforded them housing.

“Their preparation consisted of the displacing of minds of creatures who existed at various times and in many places among the universes. There were among my companions, he asserted, not only tree-men from Venus, but also members of the half-vegetable race of paleogean Antarctica; not only representatives of the great Inca civilization of Peru, but also members of the race of men who were to live on post-atomic earth, horribly altered by mutations caused by the fall-out of radioactive materials from the hydrogen and cobalt bombs of the atomic wars; not only ant-like beings from Mars, but also men from ancient Rome and men from a world fifty thousand years in the future. There were countless others from all races, from all walks of life, from worlds I knew and from worlds separated from my time by thousands upon thousands of years. For the Great Race could travel at will in time or space, and the rugose cones which now constituted their bodies were but a temporary dwelling, briefer than most, and the place where they now carried on their vast researches, filling their archives with the history of life in all time and all places, was for them but a short residence before they went on to a newer and continuing existence elsewhere, in some other form, on some other world.

“All of us who worked in the great library were assisting in the gathering of the archives, for each of us wrote the history of his own time. By sending their members forth into the void, the Great Race could both see for itself

what life was like in other times and places, and achieve an account of it in terms of the beings who lived then and there, for these were the minds which had been sent back to take the place of the missing members of the Great Race until such time as they were ready to return. The Great Race had built a machine which aided them in their flight through time and space, but it was not such a machine as had been crudely imagined by mankind, but rather one that operated on the body to separate and project the mind; and whenever a journey forward or backward in time was contemplated, the voyager submitted to the machine and the project was accomplished. Then, wherever they went in mass migration, they went unfettered; all the appurtenances, the artifacts, the inventions, even the great library would be left behind; the Great Race would begin again to build its civilization, always hoping to escape the holocaust which would come about when the Ancient Ones — great Hastur, the Unspeakable; and Cthulhu, who lies in the watery depths; and Nyarlathotep, the Messenger; and Azathoth and Yog-Sothoth and all their terrible progeny — escaped their bondage and joined again in titanic battle with the Elder Gods in their remote fastnesses among distant stars.”

This was Piper’s most recurrent dream. Actually, it was very probably not a continuing dream in the sense that it took place at one time, but rather one which was repeated, adding details, until the final version which he had set down seemed to him one repetitive dream, when in truth it had been cumulative, adding details with each recurrence. The pattern of his actions in his brief period of “normalcy” in relation to the dream was significant, for it represented a signal reversal of the proper order — in life he imitated the actions of what he later described as rugose cones inhabiting dreams which came subsequently into peripheral existence. The order should have been, normally, reversed to this; had his actions — his attempts to grasp objects as with claws, and to speak with his hands, and so — taken place after the occurrence of these vivid dreams, the normal progression would have been observed. It was significant that it did not happen in this manner.

A second recurring dream appeared to be merely an appendage to his first. Once more Piper was at work at the high table in the great library, unable to sit because there were no chairs and because the rugose cone was not meant

to sit. Once again the doomed instructor had stopped to talk with him, and Piper had questioned him about the life of the Great Race.

“I asked him how the Great Race could hope to keep secret its plans, if it replaced the displaced minds. He said this would be done in two ways. First, all trace of memory of this place would be carefully expunged before any displaced mind was returned, whether it were sent back or forward in time and space. Second, if traces remained, they were likely to be so diffuse and unconnected as to be meaningless, and, if something could be pieced together from them, it would seem so incredible to others as to be considered the workings of an overwrought imagination, if not, indeed, illness.

“He went on to tell me that the minds of the Great Race were permitted to select their habitats. They were not sent forth haphazardly to occupy the first ‘dwellings’ to which they came, but had the power of choosing among the creatures they saw which they would occupy. The mind so displaced would be sent back to the present home of the Great Race, while the member of that race who had gone forth would adjust himself to the life of the civilization to which he had gone until he had sought out the traces of the aeon-old culture which had culminated in the great upheaval between the Elder Gods and the Ancient Ones. Even after the return had been effected, and the Great Race had learned all it wished to learn of the ways of life and of the points of contact with the Ancient Ones, particularly of their minions who might oppose the Great Race, whose members had always striven for solitude and peace, but who were more closely akin to the Elder Gods than to the Ancient Ones, there were times when minds were sent out to make sure that the displaced minds had been washed clear of memory, and to reclaim them by effecting another displacement if they had not.

“He took me into the subterranean rooms of the great library. There were books everywhere, all in holograph. Cases of them were stored in tiers of rectangular vaults wrought of some unknown lustrous metal. The archives were arranged in the order of life forms, and I took note of the fact that the rugose creatures of the dark star were held to be of a higher order than man, for the race of man was not very far from the reptilian orders which

immediately preceded it on Earth. When asked about this, the instructor confirmed that it was so. He explained that contact with Earth was maintained only because it had once been the center of the great battleground between the Elder Gods and the Ancient Ones, and the minions of the latter existed there unknown to most men — the Deep Ones in the ocean depths, the batrachian people of Polynesia and the Innsmouth country of Massachusetts, the dreaded Tcho-Tcho people of Tibet, the shantaks of Kadath in the Cold Waste, and many others, and because it might now be necessary for the Great Race to retreat once more to that green planet which had first been their home. Only yesterday, he said — a time which seemed infinitely long ago, for the length of the days and nights was equivalent to a week on Earth — one of the minds had returned from Mars and reported that that planet was farther along the way toward death even than their own star, and thus one more prospective haven had been lost.

“From these subterranean reaches, he took me to the top of the building. This was a great tower domed in a substance like glass, from which I could look out over the landscape below. I saw then that the forest of fernlike trees which I had seen was of dried green leaves, not fresh, and that far from the edge of the forest stretched an interminable desert which descended into a dark gulf, which, my guide explained, was the dried bed of a great ocean. The dark star had come within the outermost orbit of a nova and was now slowly and surely dying. How strange indeed that landscape looked! The trees were stunted, in comparison to the great building of megalithic stone out of which we peered; no bird flew across that grey heaven; no cloud was there; no mist hung above the abyss; and the light of the distant sun which illuminated the dark star came indirectly out of space, so that the landscape was bathed forever in a grey unreality.

“I shuddered to look upon it.”

Piper’s dreams grew steadily more fraught with fright. This fear seemed to exist on two planes — one which bound him to Earth, another which bound him to the dark star. There was seldom much variation. A secondary theme which occurred two or three times in his dream sequence was that of being permitted to accompany the instructor-warder to a curious circular room

which must have been at the very bottom of the colossal tower. In each such case one of their number was stretched out upon a table between glittering domes of a machine which shone a blinking and wavering light as if it were of some kind of electricity, though, as with the lamps on the work-tables, there were no wires leading to or from it.

As the light pulsations increased and brightened, the rugose cone on the table became comatose and remained so for some time, until the light wavered and the hum of the machine failed. Then the cone came to life once more, and immediately began an excited jabbering of whistling and clicking sounds. This scene was invariable. Piper understood what was being said, and he believed that what he had witnessed in each case was the return of a mind belonging to the Great Race, and the sending back of the displaced mind which had occupied the rugose cone in its absence. The substance of the rapid talk of the revived cone was always quite similar; it amounted to a report in summary of the great mind's sojourn away from the dark star. In one instance the great mind had just come back from Earth after five years as a British anthropologist, and he pretended to have himself seen the places where the minions of the Ancient Ones lay in wait. Some had been partially destroyed — as, for instance, were a certain island not far from Ponape, in the Pacific, and Devil Reef off Innsmouth, and a mountain cavern and pool near Machu Pichu — but other minions were widespread, with no organization, and the Ancient Ones who remained on Earth were imprisoned under the five-pointed star which was the seal of the Elder Gods. Of the places which were reported potentially future homes for the Great Race, Earth was always a leading contender, despite the danger of atomic war.

It was clear, in the progression of Piper's dreams, despite their confusion, that the Great Race contemplated flight to some planet or star far distant from the dying star which they occupied, and that vast regions of the green planet where few men lived — places covered with ice, great sandy regions in the hot countries — offered a haven to the Great Race. Basically, Piper's dreams were all very similar. Always there was the vast structure of megalithic basalt blocks, always the interminable working by those peculiar beings who had no need of sleep, invariably the feeling of imprisonment,

and, in real life concomitantly the omnipresent fear of which Piper could not shake himself free.

I concluded that Piper was the victim of a very deep confusion, unable to relate dream to reality, one of those unhappy men who could no longer know which was the real world — that of his dreams or that in which he walked and talked by day. But even in this conclusion I was not wholly satisfied, and how right I was to question my judgment I was soon to learn.

III

Amos Piper was my patient for a period just short of three weeks. I observed in him throughout that time, however much to my dismay and to the discredit of such treatment, as I attempted, a steady deterioration in his condition. Hallucinatory data — or what I took to be such — began to make their appearance, particularly in the development of the typical paranoid delusions of being followed and watched. This development reached its climax in a letter Piper wrote to me and sent by the hand of a messenger. It was a letter obviously written in great haste...

“Dear Dr. Corey, Because I may not see you again, I want to tell you that I am no longer in any doubt about my position. I am satisfied that I have been under observation for some time — not by any terrestrial being, but by one of the minds of the Great Race — for I am now convinced that all my visions and all my dreams derive from that three-year period when I was displaced — or ‘not myself,’ as my sister would put it. The Great Race exists apart from my dreams. It has existed for longer than mankind’s measure of time. I do not know where they are — whether in the dark star in Taurus or farther away. But they are preparing to move again, and one of them is nearby.

“I have not been idle between visits to your office. I have had time to make some further private inquiries of my own. Many connecting links to my dreams have alarmed and baffled me. What, for instance, actually happened at Innsmouth in 1928 that caused the federal government to drop depth charges off Devil Reef in the Atlantic coast just out of that city? What was it in that seacoast town that brought about the arrest and subsequent banishing of half the citizenry? And what was the connecting link between the Polynesians and the people of Innsmouth? Too, what was it that the Miskatonic Antarctic Expedition of 1930-31 discovered at the Mountains of Madness, of such a nature that it had to be kept quiet and secret from all the world except the savants at the university? What other explanation is there for the Johannsen narrative but a corroborative account of the legendry of

the Great Race? And does this not also exist in the ancient lore of the Inca and Aztec nations?

“I could go for many pages, but there is no time. I discovered scores of such subtly disturbing related incidents, most of them hushed up, kept secret, suppressed, lest they disturb an already sorely troubled world. Man, after all, is only a brief manifestation on the face of but a single planet in only one of the vast universes which fill all space. Only the Great Race knows the secret of eternal life, moving through space and time, occupying one habitation after another, becoming animal or vegetable or insect, as the circumstances demand.

“I must hurry — I have so little time. Believe me, my dear doctor, I know whereof I write...”

I was not, in view of this letter, particularly surprised to learn from Miss Abigail Piper that her brother had suffered a “relapse” within a few hours, apparently, of the writing of this letter. I hastened to the Piper home only to be met at the door by my one-time patient. But he was now completely changed.

He presented to me a self-assurance he had not shown in my consultation room or at any time since first I had met him. He assured me that he had won control of himself at last, that the visions to which he had been subjected had vanished, and that he could now sleep free of the disturbing dreams which had so troubled him. Indeed, I could not doubt that he had made a recovery, and I was at a loss to understand why Miss Piper should have written me that frantic note, unless she had become so accustomed to her brother in his disoriented state that she had mistaken his improvement for a “relapse.” This recovery was all the more remarkable since every evidence — his increasing fears, his hallucinations, his mounting nervousness, and, finally, his hasty letter — combined to indicate, as surely as any physical symptom ever did a disease, a collapse of what remained of his sanity.

I was pleased with his recovery, and congratulated him. He accepted my congratulations with a faint smile, and then excused himself, saying that

there was much for him to do. I promised to call once again in a week or so, to watch against any return of the earlier symptoms of his distressed state.

Ten days later I called on him for the last time. I found him affable and courteous. Miss Abigail Piper was present, somewhat distraught, but uncomplaining. Piper had had no further dreams or visions, and was able to talk quite frankly of his “illness,” deprecating any mention of “disorientation” or “displacement” with an insistence that I could interpret only as great anxiety that I should not retain such impressions. I spent a very pleasant hour with him; but I could not escape the conviction that whereas the troubled man I had known in my office was a man of matching intelligence, the “recovered” Amos Piper was a man of far vaster intelligence than my own.

At the time of my visit, he impressed me with the fact that he was making ready to join an expedition to the Arabian desert country. I did not then think of relating his plans to the curious journeys he had made during the three years of his illness. But subsequent happenings brought this forcibly to mind.

Two nights later, my office was entered and rifled. All the original documents pertaining to the problem of Amos Piper were removed from my files. Fortunately, impelled by an intuition for which I could not account, I had had presence of mind enough to make copies of the most important of his dream accounts, as well as of the letter he had written me at the end, for this, too, was removed. Since these documents could have had no meaning or value to anyone but Amos Piper, and since Piper was now presumably cured of his obsession, the only conclusion that presented itself in explanation of this strange robbery was in itself so bizarre that I was reluctant to entertain it. Moreover, I ascertained that Piper departed on his journey on the following day, establishing the possibility in addition to the probability of his having been the instrument — I write “instrument” advisedly — of the theft.

But a recovered Piper would have no valid desire for the return of the data. On the other hand, a “relapsed” Piper would have every reason to want these papers destroyed. Had Piper, then, suffered a second disorientation, one which was this time not obvious, since the mind displacing his would

have no need to accustom itself again to the habits and thought-patterns of man?

However incredible this hypothesis, I acted on it by initiating some inquiries of my own. I intended originally to spend a week — possibly a fortnight — in pursuit of the answers to some of the questions Amos Piper had put to me in his last letter. But weeks were not enough; the time stretched into months, and by the end of a year, I was more perplexed than ever. More, I trembled on the edge of that same abyss which had haunted Piper.

For something had indeed taken place at Innsmouth in 1928, something which had involved the federal government at last, and about which nothing but the most vaguely terrifying hints of a connection to certain batrachian people of Ponape — none of this official — ever seeped out. And there were oddly disquieting discoveries made at some of the ancient temples at Angkor-Vat, discoveries which were linked to the culture of the Polynesians as well as to that of certain Indian tribes of Northwestern America, and to certain other discoveries made at the Mountains of Madness by an expedition from Miskatonic University.

There were scores of similar related incidents, all shrouded in mystery and silence. And the books — the forbidden books Amos Piper had consulted — these were at the library of Miskatonic University, and what was in such pages as I read was hideously suggestive in the light of all Amos Piper had said, and all I had subsequently confirmed. What was there set forth, however indirectly, was that somewhere there did exist a race of infinitely superior beings — call them gods or the Great Race or any other name — who could indeed send their free minds across time and space. And if this were accepted as a premise, then it could also be true that Amos Piper's mind had once again been displaced by that mind of the Great Race sent to find out whether all memory of his stay among the Great Race had been expunged.

But perhaps the most damningly disturbing facts of all have only gradually come to light. I took the trouble to look up everything I could discover about the members of the expedition to the Arabian desert which Amos Piper had joined. They came from all corners of the earth, and were all men

who might be expected to show an interest in an expedition of that nature — a British anthropologist, a French Palentologist, a Chinese scholar, an Egyptologist — there were many more. And I learned that each of them, like Amos Piper, had some time within the past decade suffered some kind of seizure, variously described, but which was undeniably a personality displacement precisely the same as Piper's.

Somewhere in the remote wastes of the Arabian desert, the entire expedition vanished from the face of the earth.

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Perhaps it was inevitable that my persistent inquiries should stir interest in quarters beyond my reach. Yesterday, a patient came to my office. There was that in his eyes which made me think of Amos Piper, when last I saw him — a patronizing, aloof superiority, which made me cringe mentally, together with a certain awkwardness of the hands. And last night I saw him again, passing under the streetlight across from the house. Once more this morning, like a man studying another's every habit for some reason too devious for his intended victim to know... And now, coming across the street...

*

The scattered pages of the above manuscript were found on the floor of Dr. Nathaniel Corey's office, when his resident nurse summoned police as a result of an alarming disturbance behind the locked door of the office. When the police broke in, Dr. Corey and an unidentified patient were found on their knees on the floor, both trying vainly to push the sheets of paper toward the flames of the fireplace in the north wall of the room.

The two men seemed unable to grasp the pages, but were nudging them forward with strange, crab-like motions. They were oblivious of the police, and were bent only on the destruction of the manuscript, continuing their unnatural efforts toward that end with a frenzied haste. Neither man was able to give an intelligent account of himself to the police or to medical attendants, nor was either even coherent in what he did say.

Since, after competent examination, both appeared to have suffered a profound personality displacement, they have been removed for indefinite confinement in the Larkin Institute, the well-known private asylum for the insane...