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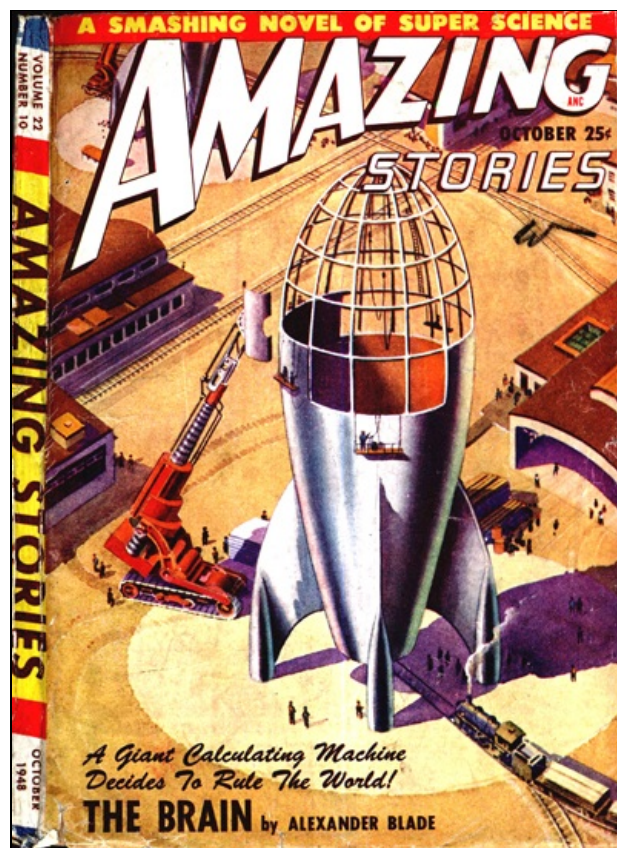
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The writer hated to create bug-eyed monsters, but they hated him too!

# DEATH OF A B. E. M.

By BERKELEY LIVINGSTON



The B. E. M. purred contentedly as the giant stroked his eyeballs

"Blast them!" the writer groaned in bitter accents. "How I hate those B. E. M's.!"

"Hang them!" the artist yelled. "How I hate those B. E. M's.!"

"Darn them!" the B. E. M. moaned. "How I hate those humans!"

---

The artist and the writer sat staring at each other in wordless misery, their coffee untasted and their spirits at low ebb. Up above, in the beehive that was the publishing house which gave them their livelihood, the word had gone around. *B. E. M'S, B. E. M'S...*

Sadly, in accents forlorn, the writer said:

"Bug-eyed monsters! Ye gads! Bug-eyed monsters! Jack, old boy, do you realize we're setting science-fiction back a hundred years?"

"I know just how you feel, Harry," the artist replied. "After all, we too had presumed that we had been freed of these monsters. So back we go to the drawing board, our minds tortured and twisted ..." He sighed disconsolately.

"Oh, well," the writer sighed and blew out his breath. He stared fixedly at his coffee until a something blue slipped into focus. His glance traveled upward from the hem of the girl's apron, past the lovely swell of her charms and on past the sweet throat, to the gay, smiling face and sparkling eyes. Forgotten then were B. E. M's. for both. Diane, the goddess of the restaurant corps of enchanting waitresses, was at their

side....

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Hiah-Leugh was having his eyeballs massaged. It was a delicate and tedious operation for the one doing the massaging; not every Goman was possessed of eight eyeballs. But Hiah-Leugh was not an ordinary Goman. Not he! He was chief of all the Gomans, which meant he was head of all the bug-eyed monsters on the whole of the planet of XYZ268PDQ.

The four-headed slave, one of the giants Hiah-Leugh's tribe had captured on one of their forays into the terrible forest of Evil Contractions, scratched himself with one of his six arms. He was quite bored with this peaceful, though tedious pursuit the tribe of Hiah-Leugh had given to him as his duties. Especially the massaging of eyeballs. Of course it helped to have six arms. Ooh! His four heads ranged themselves in a single line.

The slave had committed a sin.

There were three cardinal sins on the planet of XYZ268PDQ. Two of them were unmentionable and the third was forgetting to massage all of the eight eyeballs of Hiah-Leugh at one and the same time. If it were not for the massage the giants of the planet would all live in peace. But it took a man with six arms to do the job. In fact it was to the regret of Hiah-Leugh that the giants did not have eight arms.

Now one of the eyelids was closing. In a second or two it would be closed completely and once a single of the eight eyes closed the others automatically followed suit. There was but a single thing to do in this case. The giant did it.

He poked his finger into the drooping lid.

Hiah-Leugh awoke with a suddenness of shock and startled surprise. He howled in pain then leaped from the chair, scuttling about the room-of-massage on his twelve pairs of crablike legs at a great pace.

"Heavens to Betsy!" Hiah-Leugh screamed. "You *are* the clumsiest giant.... But what can a B. E. M. expect? Oh, well! You're excused. Go and see if there are any children to frighten...."

There were four different expressions on the four heads. One showed pleasure, and another, surprise and a third, gloom and the fourth was blank completely. This head was the dumb one. It had but one expression, blankness. The four heads bent and the great body bowed low, and slowly, with great effort and with many bumpings into various pieces of furniture, the giant bowed himself out of the massage parlor.

Hiah-Leugh was left alone.

But not for long. Suddenly a whole section of the wall slid back showing another room. This was the famous Gloating Chamber of Hiah-Leugh. Here were brought all the victims the tribe captured. And here it was that their chief was supposed to spend his time in *Gloating* over the tortures his torturers were supposed to spend their time in devising. But business had been very bad lately. Not only was there not a single victim in the Gloating Chamber, there was not a single torturer available. Hiah-Leugh suddenly remembered. Something about a picnic.... Then why had the wall slid back?

"*Hiah-Leugh! Hiah-Leugh!*" it was the clarion call of his ninth concubine, the lovely and charming Sally Patuca. But what in the name of all that was unmentionable was she doing in the Gloating Chamber? Of course she too could be *Gloating!*

He moved slowly toward the room, hoping against hope she was not in a bad mood. The last time she had called in that tone of voice he had suffered greatly. She had made him go without an eyeball massage for a whole week....

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She was pacing back and forth on the long, raised platform. Hiah-Leugh skirted the Iron Maiden, the Pallid Pulley, the Bronze Beater, the Copper Conker, and Giant Mas-Mixer, which was a fake. Nothing was ever mixed in it except the noxious weed Hiah-Leugh used in his pipe. At the sound of his approach Sally stopped her pacing and fixed him with a baleful glance out of eyes, four and five. Eyes, two and three were busy seeing if her coiffure was right and eyes one, six and seven were having their lids tweezed. After all, she had twelve pairs of legs which were also used for hands. A heck of a lot could be done with so many appendages.

She started in even before he quite reached her side:

"Where is everybody? Do I have to sit by myself every day? *Must* you have your eyeballs massaged *everyday*? Where are the torturers? Where is everybody...?"

"I think there's a picnic scheduled for today, dear," Hiah-Leugh said.

"Why wasn't I told about it?" Sally demanded.

She had very probably *been* told about it but knowing his ninth concubine and the limits of her memory, she had very surely forgotten.

"Hiah-Leugh!" she broke in on him before he could frame a reply. "I'm so terribly, terribly bored! There hasn't been a good torture since, since ... when *was* the last time there was a torture party?"

"The time Gin-Pad was caught stealing wokkerjabbies from his youngest child," Hiah-Leugh said. "We put him in the Pallid Pulley and stretched four of his legs until they were longer than the rest. And to this day Gin-Pad walks like he's looking for something between his forelegs...."

Six of Sally's seven pairs of eyes crossed suddenly, a sign she was in thought. Hiah-Leugh had the wishful hope that the seventh pair would cross. When that happened Sally would be ex-concubine. She would also be ex-living but that didn't bother him. We all have to die sometime, he thought. But why does she have to live so long? The thought processes of Sally Patuca wound their weary way and came to their proper end. Life was boresome. And she had to think of something to make it less so. She did.

"Y'know, Hiah," she said as she uncrossed her eyes, "I have an idea...."

The chief of all the Gomans rolled all eight pairs of his eyes ceiling-ward. Not another of her ideas. Oh no! Not that! The last time she had one of her ideas it was for a treasure hunt, a treasure hunt for a five-headed giant, despite Hiah-Leugh's insistence there were no such beings. But she wanted one dead or alive. She got it, dead. What Sally didn't know was that her mate gave orders to have one killed and have a fifth head sewn on his shoulders.

Love, however, was as strong on planet XYZ268PDQ as it was on any other planet, and as burdensome, and though Hiah-Leugh felt his heart sink, he also knew he would give in to her wishes.

"... What do you think of this; bring some humans up here and we'll run a torture party for our fiends?"

The male's jaw dropped, all three feet of it. This was even worse than he had imagined. *Bring some humans up here*, she said. Had she any idea of what that entailed? No. *NOO!*

He tried to reason with her:

"Darling. Wait. Don't be hasty. Let me explain. In the first place have you ever met a human?"

"What difference does that make?" she pouted. "I've heard about them."

"But sweetheart," he went on in his pleading. "They're quite horrible. They have but one head, and a single pair of arms and legs. They walk upright and they can only bear *children*...."

This was new to her.

"... Children...?"

"Yes! And they're horrible things, really. Must be raised on pablum and formulas and things like that. *Formulas*. Sounds mechanical. No, Sally, my pet. I'll think of something else. Something which will not require so much work...."

It was the wrong thing to say. He knew it the instant he said it.

"*Work!*" she yelped. "So that's what's troubling you. Too much work you say. And what is occupying your time now? Have you even so much as gone to the forest of Evil Contractions to capture a giant in the past six months? Not you! You're satisfied with the way things are. You wouldn't give a hang if I died of boredom. And when I ask for something like a torture party, all you can say is, it's too much work."

She started to cry. And after all she had seven pairs of eyes to shed tears from. It was the biggest crying jag since the invasion from space a millenium before when the invaders used tear gas....

Hiah-Leugh threw up all the arms he could spare and shouted:

"Okay. *OKAY!* I'll call a meeting of the Council and we'll plan something."

---

"The situation is this," Hiah-Leugh said in opening the meeting, "we must (get the)

right to work and bring some humans up here."

The assembled B. E. M's. stopped looking bored at the words. They had wondered why their chieftan had called the meeting. Now they knew. One after the other they repeated the words as if they couldn't believe their senses. Humans! Here on Planet XYZ268PDQ.

"But mighty chief," one of them said in objection. "Do you realize what you're asking of us?"

Another said:

"How, when...?"

And a third asked:

"Who?"

"Our scientists, that's who," Hiah-Leugh answered. "What the heck we got them for anyway? Seems all they do is sleep. Let them wake up and to work."

But the oldest and wisest of them said:

"Why can't we be normal monsters and not act like we're expected to? Isn't peace enough for us? Must we look for trouble?"

But their chieftan knew there was no turning back. Not if he wanted peace. And knowing Sally Patuca, he also knew there would be no peace for him until he brought some humans up for torture.

"Let them construct space ships, terrible weapons of war, plagues and all the necessary adjuncts to planetary invasion. Let them prepare for the holocaust," Hiah-Leugh shouted, drowning out the others.

But it was the youngest, a mere youth of ten thousand years, upon whose head but a single eye showed, who pointed out the path. He was already bored with this meeting; besides, he had but fallen in love the day before and wanted to get back to his amorata.

"Why all this fuss?" he asked. "What's more, we don't have scientists, or mathematicians, or warriors. If the giants weren't so stupid we'd never capture them. So let's stop this foolishness, this dreaming...."

That was the clue. After all, Hiah-Leugh hadn't been made chief of all the Gomans for nothing. He proved his right to the leadership then.

"That's it!" he said. "The artists and writers of the human world have made monsters of us, even though we can't do any of the things they pretend we can. There is but a single attribute we possess which they have said we do. We can project ourselves through space and time. So let us to the Earth, and pluck one or two of these humans, and if I may offer a suggestion, let us take a writer and artist from among them and bring them back with us...."

---

Harry Zmilch, writer-extraordinary of science-fiction, passed weary fingers across a furrowed brow. A few feet to the rear of the desk at which Zmilch labored stood the drawing board of Jack Gangrenyellow, the artist. He too paused in his labors. At one and the same instant they turned and regarded each other with solemn, staring eyes.

"No use, Joe," Harry said. "I can't do it. I've beaten my brain until it refuses to function. I keep typing the same word over and over again ... nuts ... nuts!... Bug-eyed monsters! There aren't such things. My imagination just can't bring them to paper."

"Nor can mine to the board," Jack said.

"Still it's easier for you," Harry said. "All you've got to do is draw a spider or huge bug of sorts, put a man and woman somewhere in the drawing, make the woman appear as if she'd lost half her clothes in a struggle, and you've got your piece. With me it's different."

Gangrenyellow snorted. This character, he thought, knew as little of art and the difficulties of composition as the next guy.

"That's what you think," he retorted. "All you guys have to do is *imagine* a monster, have a man and woman placed in peril by the monster's presence and you've got a story. With us it's different...."

Zmilch was half-turned, facing his friend across the width of one shoulder. At the other's words, Zmilch turned all the way, got up from his chair and strolled to the board on which a drawing in full color was in its last stages. The drawing depicted a

jungle scene. In the foreground a man and woman stood in petrified stance, the man's arm around the woman's shoulders. He was dressed for safari, pith helmet, breeches, boots, open shirt and all. The woman looked like she'd spent all her life in the jungle. She wore a leopard skin draped becomingly to show the greater part of her charms. They were in semiprofile so that the artist could depict the terror on their faces. And full in the center of the drawing was an immense web stretched between the boles of two jungle giants. Descending the web was a gigantic bug, or spider, the artist had not detailed it too well.

"I thought you said you were finding it hard to do?" Zmilch asked. "Why you've just about finished it."

Gangrenyellow, not to be outdone by his friend, walked over to the other's desk and read aloud from the author's manuscript:

"... Tom Brighteyes knew he hadn't the smallest chance of escaping. The hordes of Micro Ambrosia were but a short way off. Ahead the Great Swamp blocked any chances of escape for him and the Leopard Girl. Their doom was sealed. He turned to her and said:

"Leopard Girl, I love you. I know. I'm from another world, a world where men and women are not the same as this. Oh, I don't mean the outward man and woman, but the inward. This is a savage world, a world where both men and women have to struggle to exist against terrifying odds. Horrible beasts, terrible insects, and natural phenomena make this place a nightmare of existence. But here I found love and perhaps death. I am not sorry I came."

"Tom Brighteyes," the girl turned to him and drew close. "I love you too. I think I felt love from the first instant I saw you, backed against a tree, with your puny weapons facing Hogo the Mogo, king of all the swampland. Hogo the Mogo used to eat guys like you for breakfast. Yet you drew a cigarette from a silver, enamel case upon whose shining face a small chaste crest revealed your excellent taste in such things, and while Hogo the Mogo slavered his hate in your face, you drew a king's size, Exhilarato from the case and lit it with a nonchalance that took my breath away...."

"What the heck are you complaining about?" Gangrenyellow asked. "You're not doing so badly yourself."

"Yeah," said a strange voice. "Neither of you are doing badly. Everything is just horrible, isn't it? The B. E. M's. march across your pages and drawing boards with assembly-line facility. But have either of you two had any feelings for us?"

The two men turned startled and terrified faces in the direction of the mysterious voice. They could see nothing. Yet they could feel the impalpable presence of some strange being in this very room with them. Suddenly they became aware of a strange fog emanating from one wall. It swept closer drawing them into its greasy folds. The voice seemed to come from the very heart of this fog:

"... Well, perhaps things will be different soon...?"

Then the fog enveloped them completely, and their senses fled from them....

---

It was an odd sort of voice, mellow, fluid, yet holding accents of anger in its even flow:

"Both of you complained you couldn't imagine this. So we brought you here to prove its existence."

The writer and artist opened their eyes and the fog in which they'd been bound was no longer there. They were in an immense chamber whose vaulted ceiling extended for a full hundred feet in the air and seemed suspended by slender strings, so tenuous were the web-like supports, so fragile were the arches. They were standing before a tremendous table whose semi-circular length might have been fifty feet from one end to the other. And seated at the table were the most horrifying monsters they had ever seen.

There was one, a huge beetle-like thing with two heads and a scaly body and four pairs of pincers extending from the line of jaw. There was, another, somewhat like a spider, but with dozens of legs. A third was half-man, half alligator; a fourth was all snake, but with three human heads; and another was all head without body. They were, the two men realized, the most terrible *things* they had ever imagined.

"... And there is the rub," the voice went on. "We are all as you have imagined us. We exist only in your imagination."

"But how can that be?" Harry Zmilch asked. "We are here. We can see you...."

"Only because your imaginations have been developed to such a degree," the voice

replied. "Were you able to you would imagine us as something altogether different. But since there are limits to your imagination we are as we are. Now you must pay the penalty of that imagination.

"Torture will be the price we will exact from you...."

In an instant they were transported to the torture chamber. They saw the horrible machines, the Copper Conker, the Pallid Pulley, and the rest. And up on the platform they saw Sally Patica in all her glory, her seven pairs of eyes watering so great was her excitement.

The monsters got in each other's way so hurried were they to tie and make fast the two humans to the torture machines. And despite Harry's and Jack's screams, they were bound, hand and foot and placed on each of the machines in turn. But though the machines whirled and clanked and ground and grunted and snarled their vicious ways the two humans could not feel a single thing. Yet all about them the horrible monsters screamed and shouted and laughed and danced and on the platform Sally Patica shrieked with joy.

"A torture party at last," she screamed. "Oh, Hiah-Leugh, I'm so happy. I'm the happiest monster in the whole world."

But down below, on the last of the machines in the assembly line, Harry Zmilch thought as he was being whirled around, his head always meeting a mace-like thing which was supposed to shear a slice from his head at every turn but which felt like a feather, gosh! If I get back alive what a story I could do on B. E. M's.

While on another instrument of torture, the Pallid Pulley, a device supposed to tear the limbs slowly from a man, Jack Gangrenyellow thought, man! what a cover I could make if ever I get out of this.

A strange thing happened then.

The machines stopped their whirring, the monsters stopped their shriekings, and Jack and Harry stopped moving.

"Ohh, you nasty humans," Hiah-Leugh said. "Now you've spoiled our party!"

"Why?" Harry asked.

"Because all this has been in vain. All you can see is that we're monsters. And as such we have no feelings except for the giving of pain, torture and death. Gosh, fellas! Can't you see these things aren't real? We're the nicest monsters."

But all Harry and Jack could think of was that B. E. M's. were real. Further, they were as terrible as anything they had ever imagined.

"Yes," Hiah-Leugh went on. "We are as you have imagined because we live only in your imagination. And there we live as monsters. If in the beginning you had given us other lines to read and other lives to live, things might be as they really are. But no. The human race had to be the master race. The insect world and the animal world could only provide danger and conflict." He turned to the assembled monsters and said, sadly, "Okay, boys. Turn 'em loose. Let them go back to their typewriters and drawing boards...."

---

Harry Zmilch shook his head savagely and looked at his friend. He was doing the same.

"Got dizzy for a second," Harry said. "Gees! Have I got a swell ending for my story...."

"Funny," Jack said. "I got dizzy too. And have I got a sweet idea for a monster. All detail...."

Harry went back and typed:

'But Tom Brighteyes was no longer listening to the voice of his beloved. Behind him were the advance guards of Hogo the Mogo. And ahead the dreaded swamp. There was but one thing to do, go into the sixth dimension, the fifth was already too perilous. Drawing the girl within the embrace of his brawny arms, he closed his eyes and sent out the powerful thought waves which would send him into the sixth dimension....'

And at the end, he tacked on:

To be continued next month....

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DEATH OF A B.E.M \*\*\*

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