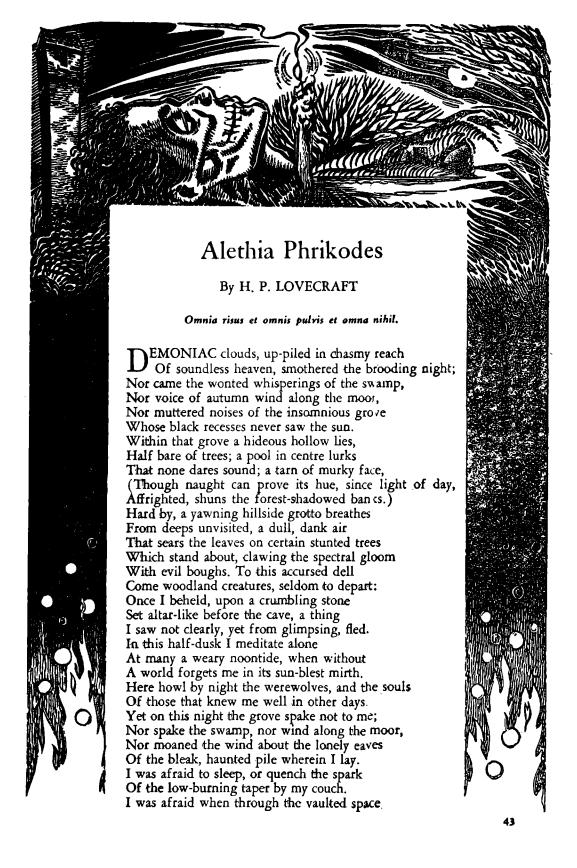


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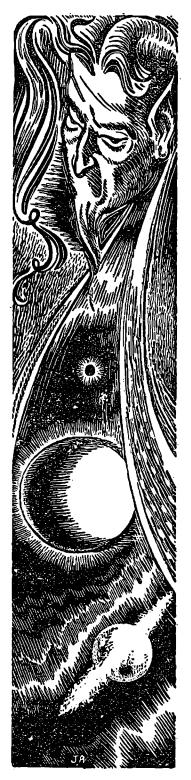


WEIRD TALES



Of the old tower, the clock-ticks died away Into a silence so profound and chill That my teeth chattered—giving yet no sound. Then flickered low the light, and all dissolved Leaving me floating in the hellish grasp Of bodied blackness, from whose beating wings Came ghoulish blasts of charnel-scented mist. Things vague, unseen, unfashioned, and unnamed Jostled each other in the seething void That gaped, chaotic, downward to a sea Of speechless horror, foul with writhing thoughts. All this I felt, and felt the mocking eyes Of the cursed universe upon my soul; Yet naught I saw nor heard, till flashed a beam Of lurid lustre through the rotting heavens, Playing on scenes I laboured not to see. Methought the nameless tarn, alight at last, Reflected shapes, and more revealed within Those shocking depths that ne'er were seen before: Methought from out the cave a demon train; Grinning and smirking, reeled in fiendish rout; Bearing within their reeking paws a load Of carrion viands for an impious feast. Methought the stunted trees with hungry arms Groped greedily for things I dare not name; The while a stifling, wraith-like noisomeness Filled all the dale, and spoke a larger life Of uncorporeal hideousness awake In the half-sentient wholeness of the spot. Now glowed the ground, and tarn, and cave, and trees, And moving forms, and things not spoken of, With such a phosphorescence as men glimpse In the putrescent thickets of the swamp Where logs decaying lie, and rankness reigns. Methought a fire-mist draped with lucent fold The well-remembered features of the grove, Whilst whirling ether bore in eddying streams The hot, unfinished stuff of nascent worlds Hither and thither through infinity Of light and darkness, strangely intermised; Wherein all eternity had consciousness, Without the accustomed outward shape of life. Of these swift circling currents was my soul, Free from the flesh, a true constituent part; Nor felt I less myself, for want of form. Then cleared the mist, and o'er a star-strown scene Divine and measureless, I gazed in awe. Alone in space, I viewed a feeble fleck Of silvern light, marking the narrow ken Which mortals call the boundless universe. On every side, each as a tiny star, Shone more creations, vaster than our own, And teeming with unnumbered forms of life; Though we as life would recognize it not,

Being bound to earthy thoughts of human mouls. As on a moonless night the Milky Way In solid sheen displays its countless orbs To weak terrestrial eyes, each orb a sun; So beamed the prospect on my wondering soul; A spangled universe, rich with twinkling gems, Yet each a mighty universe of suns. But as I gazed, I sensed a spirit voice In speech didactic, though no voice it was, Save as it carried thought. It bade me mark That all the universes in my view Formed but an atom in infinity; Whose reaches pass the ether-laden realms Of heat and light, extending to far fields Where flourish worlds invisible and vague, Filled with strange wisdom and uncanny life, And yet beyond; to myriad spheres of light, To spheres of darkness, to abysmal voids That know the pulses of disordered force. Big with these musings, I surveyed the surge Of boundless being, yet I used not eyes, For spirit leans not on the props of sense. The docent presence swelled my strength of soul; All things I knew, but knew with mind alone. Time's endless vista spread before my thought With its vast pageant of unceasing change And sempiternal strife of force and will; I saw the ages flow in stately stream Past rise and fall of universe and life; I saw the birth of suns and worlds, their death, Their transmutation into limpid flame, Their second birth and second death, their course Perpetual through the aeons' termless flight, Never the same, yet born again to serve The varying purpose of omnipotence. And whilst I watched, I knew each second's space Was greater than the lifetime of our world. Then turned my musings to that speck of dust Whereon my form corporeal took its rise; That speck, born but a second, which must die In one brief second more; that fragile earth; That crude experiment; that cosmic sport Which holds our proud, aspiring race of mites Whom ignorance in empty pomp adorns, And misinstructs in specious dignity; Those mites who, reasoning outwarn, vaunt themselves As the chief work of Nature, and enjoy In fatuous fancy the particular care Of all her mystic, super-regnant power. And as I strove to vision the sad sphere Which lurked, lost in ethereal vortices; Methought my soul, tuned to the infinite, Refused to glimpse that poor atomic blight; That misbegotten accident of space;



WEIRD TALES



That globe of insignificance, whereupon (My guide celestial told me) dwells no part Of empyreal virtue, but where breed The coarse corruptions of divine disease; The festering ailments of infinity; The morbid matter by itself called man: Such matter (said my guide) as oft breaks forth On broad Creation's fabric, to annoy For a brief instant, ere assuaging death Heal up the malady its birth provoked. Sickened, I turned my heavy thoughts away. Then spake the eternal guide with mocking mien, Upbraiding me for searching after Truth; Visiting on my mind the searing scorn Of mind superior; laughing at the woe Which rent the vital essence of my soul. Methought he brought remembrance of the time When my fellows to the grove I strayed, In solitude and dusk to meditate On things forbidden, and to pierce the veil Of seeming good and seeming beauteousness That covers o'er the tragedy of Truth, Helping mankind forget his sorry lot, And raising hope where Truth would crush it down He spake, and he ceased, methought the flames Of fuming Heaven revolved in torments dire; Whirling in maelstroms of rebellious might, Yet ever bound by laws I fathomed not. Cycles and epicycles of such girth That each a cosmos seemed, dazzled my gaze Till all a wild phantasmal glow became. Now burst athwart the fulgent formlessness A rift of purer sheen, a sight supernal, Broader than all the void conceived by man, Yet narrow here. A glimpse of heavens beyond; Of weird creations so remote and great That even my guide assumed a tone of awe. Borne on the wings of stark immensity, A touch of rhythm celestial reached my soul; Thrilling me more with horror than with joy. Again the spirit mocked my human pangs, And deep reviling me for presumptuous thoughts; Yet changing now his mien, he bade me scan The widening rift that clave the walls of space; He bade me search it for the ultimate; He bade me find the Truth I sought so long; He bade me brave the unutterable Thing, The final Truth of moving entity. All this he bade—but my soul, Clinging to live, fled without aim or knowledge, Shrieking in silence through the gibbering deeps.