


# THE WILLOWS



November/December 2008

Vol.II, Iss. 4

In these pages do we witness the future by peering into the past.

**G. D. Falken**  
*Reveals the Mastermind  
of Salmagundi's Murders!*

**Orrin Grey**  
*Pulls some Mike Mignola  
from His Bookshelf!*

**Brian Ladd**  
*Records a Mad Experiment  
for All Posterity!*

**Colin Azariah-Kribbs**  
*Brings an Exquisite  
Nightmare to Life!*

US \$5.00



1936 3591



# THE WILLOWS

BEING IN MAIN A COLLECTION OF WORKS OF  
WEIRD FICTION AND THE ROMANTIC MACABRE

ASSEMBLED UNDER THE PURVEY OF EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**BEN THOMAS**

WITH MUCH ASSISTANCE FROM CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

**SKADI MEIC BEORH**

ISSUE LAYOUT AND POEM ADORNMENTS BY

**JADE GORDON**

WITH DIVERSE PLATES BY THE TALENTED

**REYNA SPARBY**

ADDITIONAL FINE PLATES  
ENGRAVED BY STAFF ARTISTS  
Ivan McCann & Joanna Barnum  
(page 27) (page 28)

COVER PLATE BY  
**Joanna  
Barnum**

PUBLICITY ACROSS THE GLOBE BY OUR ADVERTISING SALES MANAGER

**EVELYN KRIETE**

The Willows is prepared and distributed by a society of gentlemen and ladies desirous of the continuation of classic traditions of the weird tale, seasoned with fresh new talent.





# DEPARTMENTS

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

6

SIR ORRIN GREY'S CABINET OF ESOTERIC MANUSCRIPTS

88

# FEATURED TALES

*The Strange Case of the All-Seeing Ear, Part VI* † G.D. Falksen

In which the detectives at last uncover the source of Salmagundi's murderous menace!

10

*Cootie Watts and the Phonograph* † Brian K. Ladd

In which a veteran jazz singer discovers a recording session of the *conte cruel* variety.

28

*The Fond Nightmare* † Colin Azariah-Kribbs

In which a lonely wanderer converses with phantoms whose nature he cannot discern.

33



## MORE FICTION

*The Sailor*

Albert Melear

37

*Lexicon Rex: A Tragedy*

Edmund Siderius

41

*Robert's Refuge*

J.R. Restruck

47

*Glenda*

J. J. Beazley

60

*The Priest*

Matthew Acheson

71

*The Zumundo Cog*

Patrick Scalisi

75

*Pinprick*

Skadi meic Beorh

85

## POETRY

*The Tailors* by Lucien Spelman ✠

58

*Small Favors* by Jack Hadju ✠

7

FROM THE

# EDITOR'S DESK




**A**s another year of Victorian literature draws to a close, dear readers, I feel both this periodical and the culture it represents have developed a great deal. Our growth has been exponential, aided in no small part by the efforts of authors like G. D. Falksen and Sarah Monette, who exposed their fanbases to *The Willows*, and thus discovered vast new contingents of subscribers. In return, we have done our best to adorn these tales with lavish art, and the most professional presentation possible. On the whole, I am told, we have succeeded.

I also do not deny that the previous year was one filled with typographical errors, cranky authors (and editors), printing mishaps (luckily of the non-fatal variety), and setbacks of every other kind. The launch of an international magazine proved more challenging than I ever expected, in both the labor and finance realms. The support of our staff, who largely work pro bono or for token payments, and that of our readers, has taken us further than I dreamed possible, even one year ago.

If you have missed any issues of 2008, I encourage you to attempt to track them down; every single one contained material that Skadi and I hand-picked to fit our vision of dark, mythologically-influenced Victorian fiction. For our July issue, Matt Carey's *The Organist of Congress Avenue* wasn't even a featured tale, but we went overboard on the art design for the tale, giving the musical score an attractive setting. Way back in January, we published an absolutely mad story titled *Bowel Piglet*, about this ancient *King-in-Yellow*-ish play that drove its performers to murderous acts of savagery--the sort of elegant grand guignol one finds regularly among certain authors of the Arkham House circle, but so rarely in modern horror. And in May we printed Paul Marlowe's *The Resident Member*, which is a great deal funnier than a tale of a parlor seance has any right to be. I could go on, but this paragraph is already enormous.

In times when money is an issue for nearly all of us, I appreciate the continued support of those of you who have ordered subscriptions for friends and family; such help is indispensable. I will continue to do my best to provide our beloved readership with regular volumes of attractively presented tales of the weird; already we have an splendid lineup of tales for the January issue, and in March we will hopefully be ready to release the Archaeology Issue at last. In short, we have no intentions of slowing down, and our slushpile overflows with submissions.

So, here we find ourselves; at the bottom of the page again. So many revelations remain to be told...so many plans to be unveiled...but I cannot speak any more of them here, when an entire issue awaits you now. Go, and enjoy this holiday feast! 

Ben Thomas  
Editor-in-Chief



# The Priest

Matthew Acheson



The pale light from the full moon cast an evil glow on the shattered walls and ruined columns of the fallen temple. Its creators had carved it directly into the side of a sandstone ridge, which afforded the place a spectacular overlook of the desert wasteland for miles in every direction. Once, long ago, it had been the seat of a very old, very powerful cult before the pharaoh Akhenaton came to power and cleansed the site with fire and iron. What little remained of its ancient splendor lay buried in the harsh desert many miles outside of Luxor. It did not appear on any map, and tourists never wandered its ruined halls.

Only a handful of the local Bedouins even knew of its existence, and fewer still dared to venture there.

Ahmed coaxed the camel to lie down by clicking his tongue against the roof of his mouth in rapid succession. Then he extended his hand to help the priest down from the beast, all the while his eyes never straying away

from that evil place for longer than a few seconds.

“Are you certain you wish to go in there, Father?” he asked with gravity in his voice.

The aged priest ignored the question and made his way towards the temple. Ahmed followed him at a slower pace, squinting down at the ground in an attempt to avoid stepping on a serpent, or into a scorpion hole. As they neared the stone stairwell snaking its way around the ridge and up to the entrance of the ruins, he stopped and cast his gaze skyward.

The ruined shell of the ancient temple loomed up at him out of the darkness. The atmosphere of the place was genuinely unsettling, and Ahmed’s hands began to shake at the thought of setting foot on such unholy ground. Had his family not been so desperately in need of the money, he would have fled from those wastes and never looked back. He made a gesture to the heavens and bowed his head. “Allah

have mercy," he said aloud, and then followed the priest up into the temple.

From the inside, the ancient structure was anything but impressive. It was little more than a large, open space hemmed in on three sides by crumbling stonework and on the fourth by the ridge itself. Most of the columns were fallen and half buried by drifts of sand carried in by the desert winds.

"Thank you for guiding me here, my son," the old priest said. "This is indeed the place that I sought. I wonder if you would fetch my luggage for me before I release you from my service?"

"Of course, Father." Ahmed bowed his head and made his way out of the edifice and back down to the camels. The luggage to which the priest had referred was a solitary wooden chest of sturdy construction and considerable size. Indeed it was so large that Ahmed had been obliged to fasten several ropes around it so that it could be dragged behind the priest's camel. With the aid of his *kard*, a Persian knife made from Damascus steel with a camel bone grip, he freed the chest from its bonds and hauled it to the base of the ridge. With a great deal of panting and sweating, he managed to drag the heavy box up the twisting stairwell, through the ruined portal, and into the temple.

Near the center of the open area were a dozen large candles arranged in a circle and burning with an eerie orange glow. The priest had apparently been busy in his absence. Although he had never seen one with his own eyes, Ahmed had heard from his cousin Ali that Catholic masses were highly ritualistic affairs involving the burning of candles and incense in great quantities. He had no desire to stay long enough to find out what sort of ceremony the priest intended to perform, but as he had not yet received his payment, he had little choice.

"Thank you, Ahmed. You may go now," the priest said, his voice hissing from the cowl of his hooded robe. "I have no further need of your services."

Not wishing to view a heretical ceremony firsthand, Ahmed was only too happy to oblige. With a slight bow he excused himself and retired back down to the camels. He removed his tobacco pipe from one of the saddle bags and found himself a large, smooth rock to sit on. *When will I be paid?* he wondered as he stuffed the bowl of his pipe. After inhaling several long draws of smoke, he began to relax a little and wait patiently for the priest to finish his ceremony.

After a time, the wind began to increase, kicking sand up into his bearded face. Along with it came the gentle whisper of voices in the distance. He turned his ear towards the temple proper and cupped a hand around it to listen. At first the voice sounded far away and indistinct, but as time wore on it became gradually louder and louder. The shouting sounded almost frantic, and it occurred to him that the priest must have been calling for help. He leapt to his feet and ran to the temple as fast as his skinny legs could carry him.

Ahmed burst through the ruined archway, expecting to see the old priest laying prone and crying out for help. Instead, what he saw was so shocking and terrible to behold that it sucked the air from his lungs and sapped the strength from his limbs. His knees buckled, and he tumbled to the sand in a heap of flesh and clothing. As much as he wanted to will his frozen limbs into action, all he could do was watch the scene before him with a sense of awe and horror.

With a strange object held aloft, the old priest walked a slow circle around the candles, chanting aloud as he went. Rising up from the candles

was a flickering column of greenish-blue light. In the center was the naked form of a man. Judging from the gaping wounds on his legs, which had been severed from the knees down, the man had been dead for some time. Ahmed realized at once what the cargo in the priest's chest had been.

*"Gh'ryaane Ryeohgeoth,* answer my summons," the withered priest said over and over in a deep baritone.

At first Ahmed thought his eyes were playing tricks on him, but as the movements became increasingly pronounced he realized that it was not his imagination. The arms and head of the corpse twitched. He watched with a mixture of disbelief and horrified fascination as the dead man's lips began to move. The voice that spoke was raspy and sounded so unnatural that it sent ice-cold shivers up and down his spine and brought goose bumps to his arms and neck.

"What fool has called me?"

"I call," the old priest replied.

The creature's eyelids fluttered open, and Ahmed thought that they emitted a dull, reddish glow.

"No priest would be foolish enough to evoke me in this place of power," the monster said in a menacing tone. "Who are you?"

"I seek information," the old man replied.

"Ah!" it said, its voice hideous. "You are a sorcerer!"

"I have bound you within this body, and within this circle, demon,"

the old priest said. "There you shall stay until you have answered my question."

The demon's laugh was so heinous and unnatural that it sent pinpricks of fear surging throughout Ahmed's body. He tried to stand and flee, but his body was frozen with horror, his gaze fixed on the blasphemous scene unfolding before him.

"I answer to no mortal," the devil said as its body went into a series of convulsions. The old priest tensed. The two were engaged in a mental struggle, the depths of which

Ahmed could never hope to comprehend. Terrified that the demon might break the will of the priest, Ahmed made a fresh effort to escape. Still unable to stand, he began to push himself backwards through the sand with his feet.

Finally the demon ended the struggle with a howl of frustration. "You cannot hold me forever, mortal! You will tire, and when you do, I will be waiting."

"I wish to summon your master," the old man replied, ignoring its threats. "What is its true name so that I might call out to it?" At that moment the wind picked up, and its airy screaming blotted out much of the conversation. Ahmed watched as the priest turned his back to the demon and began to walk away. For a moment the creature's howl rose above that of the wind, and the old man stopped and swung around to face it.

"Then give me your master's true name," he shouted above the din.

As if by the priest's own will, the buffeting of the wind ceased altogether and the desert air became calm again.

He watched with a mixture of disbelief and horrified fascination as the dead man's lips began to move!



Ahmed had backed his way across the sand almost to the upper landing of the stairwell, but even from that distance he could see the creature's body writhing in agony.

"*B'halek Dhar R'uksuir,*" it finally said, squealing.

The crooked form of the old priest straightened, and it seemed to Ahmed as if he became considerably thicker as well. The creature's limbs ceased their flailing, and its prone form froze in place.

"You are no sorcerer!" it said in a high pitched voice. "Who are you?"

"You disappoint me, Ryeohgeoth," the priest replied as he drew a long object from the folds of his robe. The blade curved wickedly, bending the very beams of moonlight around it so that they gathered on its surface with an awful, deadly glow.

"No, master! Have mercy!" the demon cried in desperation.

The old priest raised the evil knife high into the air, and then thrust it down into the devil's chest with uncanny speed. A shrill scream issued from the creature's mouth, and its body writhed as death came to take it. It was a cry so terrible that it would haunt Ahmed's dreams for the remainder of his life. Finally the wailing stopped, and the greenish-blue light vanished along with it.

It took Ahmed's eyes several long moments to adjust to the darkness,


and when they did he spotted the form of the priest padding towards him. He managed to clamber to his feet for a moment before collapsing back to the sand. His entire body trembled with fear, and he felt the caress of warm liquid as it trickled down his leg. In what he expected to be his final moments, Ahmed the carpet weaver tried to make peace with his maker.

"Allah forgive me," he said through chattering teeth. "Protect me from the Jinn and guide me to all truth."

The tall figure of the priest loomed over him suddenly. The old man pulled the cowl of his robe back and leered down at Ahmed with a toothy grin and eyes glowing like hot coals. "Ahmed, I thought I dismissed you. What are you still doing here?" he said.

Ahmed tried to speak, but the words died on his lips.

"Of course. Your payment. How careless of me to forget," the priest said. He reached into his robes, withdrew a leather pouch and gave it a meaningful shake. Ahmed heard the unmistakable sound of coins clinking together. "I always reward my faithful servants," he said, tossing the bag of coins down onto Ahmed's chest.

Then with a flash and a loud fluttering of his robes, the priest melted into the night. 

"The Egyptians have a strong oral tradition of folklore about the Jinn that haunt the lonely, remote wastes of the Sahara Desert. *The Priest* is an amalgamation of my own fancy and the tales I encountered during my travels there. It was written to entertain my nieces, Jocelyn and Kati, around the fireplace, and I am dedicating it to them."