

# CLEAR ETHER

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Acknowledgments for title to E. E. Smith, Ph.D., fellow chemist and lensman manque.

A ASTRUM USQUE AD ASTER

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I don't know why Mike keeps spreading those vicious rumours about the Anarchoslum. Fortunately, NYUSFSfen now know better, having seen it first hand. Leastways those who have returned... But I can explain that. Let me begin at the beginning.

\*ring\* Consciousness. Reject.  
\*ring again\* Sear consciousness. Reluctantly reach up arm, mostly by reflex. Hand clutches phone, pulls over to ear, located somewhere around head. Head? Think pillow.

"Konkin."

"Sam, listen, is it all right to have the NYUSFS meeting over at the anarchoslum today?"

(Thought: It's before 5 O'Clock so I have had less than 4 hours sleep.)

"I thought we were not going to have a meeting until the 9th. Well, at least it's not Co-Op City, better known as 'The City on the Edge of Forever.'"

"Good, I already told Richard and he's calling people up. Can you phone Phil and Neil?"

"Sure." \*click\* Promptly forget and roll over.

((time passes))

"Mike, I think someone wants to get upstairs by now. Why don't you go down and see."

\*creak\* "Hi. Come on up. Yes, you have to sort of scrunch to get in the door..."

\*various things crawl away from the doorway edge you brushed against.\*

"Oh, did you ring the doorbell?"

\*door opens at the end of the hallway on the other side of the stairway\*

"Why don't you go up first and I'll hold off the Mary-thing."

\*slither, slither\* \*race for stairway as Mike talks with...It\*

\*pant, pant\* "It's all right, no serious wounds. Just seared psyche where fear and leathing touched me."

"What, no, this is just the first landing. What say we take a break here? I haven't had a cigarette since I opened the door for you, nearly three minutes ago."

"What are you standing in? Well, there are large cats around here, and, well, 'Fish gotta swim, birds gotta fly, and cats gotta...right."

"Interesting smell? Yeah, reminds me a little of the time I was in Florida. In the Everglades. The swamp, that is."

"No, this is just the third landing. I think we can go without food or water for at least two more flights. What's that, the john? Well, let me explain about Sam's toilet...start by imagining an outhouse with plumbing."

\*flit by\*

"No, we don't have rats. Probably the anarchomouse's ghost. Yeah, I killed him when we first moved in. Ever since then,...well, Sam claims there were other live ones, but after Tony drowned one...how? Well, he was filling his bathtub and..."

\*sounds of thousands of tiny marching feet\*

"Well, here we are on the sixth floor. Penthouse, you might say. Heh, heh."

\*More marching\* Tiny voices: hup, two, three, four, hup, two...  
Puhh away foliage and cobwebs wearily.

"Hey, don't stop now. You can make it guys, you can make it. Look there's the door now."

"Roaches? Oh, yes, the Field Marshal's crew. Headquarters under the stove. Man, you should see them

come out and die when Sam starts spraying."

Tiny voice: there's divisions more where they came from. get in line there, private archie.

\*squash\*

"Ah, Tony's door is open. Let me summon him. ODIN!"

Strange music is playing. The barbarian is going through motions which appear like primitive dance with an axe in one hand and a hammer in the other. \*slash, swipe. slash, swipe\*

"Hey, Anton, the fen are over for a meeting."

"Oh, just a minute Mike."

The fen fearfully enter the slum kitchen, where eldritch things are cooking and pots are bubbling in an unholy manner.

Music changes to classical and everyone is placed around a well-done table in excellent furniture. Windows are barred medieval-style, and bows and quivers adorn the wall. Not to mention trophies.

\*ride of the Valkyries\*

"So where's Sam?"

"On the phone. I think Richard just called to say he is sick again and can't come."

"Should we go over there..."

"Oh, not till you have had some tea. Or maybe you'd like this elderberry wine the landlady gave us..."

\*knock, knock\*

"So I still think you're copping out of fanac to do something unfannish, like scientific research, Rich...hold on, something at the door."

\*open\* Various fen crowd in. Sighs of relief breathed.

"Yeah, Rich, they're all here now. How many? I count eight of us. Hey, how many of you started out?"

"Hey, Sam, they want to use the can, I think."

"Oh, let me explain about the toilet. Now, I don't care what Moslow has told you, it does not really suck you off. You do have to keep an eye on the suction cup, though..."

"What's that, Rich? You want to give the Society's Narnia trilogy to...Hey, keep it down. The Thornton's ghost still walks through these halls. I know he's not dead yet...I think..."

((still more time passes))

Well, it's time to be heading to the restaurant. Yeah, should be no trouble getting down the stairs. Mike told you about the Mary-thing? Oh, she doesn't bother me at all. Now, the Old Charlie who gets locked out on the roof and howls until he is let in...and then, well, needless to say, I definitely have it in for him. (Watch your step.)

Yeah, our security is pretty good here since John installed all the police locks and grillework. I was burglarized only once since I moved in. Never modested on the streets, unless you count that joker that said he wanted to hold me up. Just don't pay attention to him...

There's the last flight. What's that you let in when the door opened? Oh yeah, clean air. Let me light up my pipe so I don't have to smell it too long. Oxygen can be bad for you I hear. Didn't the FDA do a survey ...?

Well, now that we're out, and you've seen the famed anarchoslum, tell me, didn't Mike exaggerate? Nothing extraordinary about it at all, right? Exactly where you'd expect an Albertan anarchochemist and a Queensian-from-Brooklyn whatever to hole up.

I mean, honestly, some people will do anything and make up all sorts of stuff just for a story...

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Now, about those missing fen...

QUIEKIE REVIEW: Jim Baen let me down. In the December Galaxy was a Stegen Utley story about a demon named "Ember Eyes." Seems he was created by surgery or whatever to have intelligence but be a werewolf or something animal-like and kill decadent humans who went out for the thrills from their cities. Off the humans are now flying in their space ships, and Ember Eyes is freaking out. "What's my purpose now," he asks.

His kids are adapting and tell him that they're growing up. The humans are too. But the demon can't. And I guess Utley won't. Tsk, tsk, Jim.